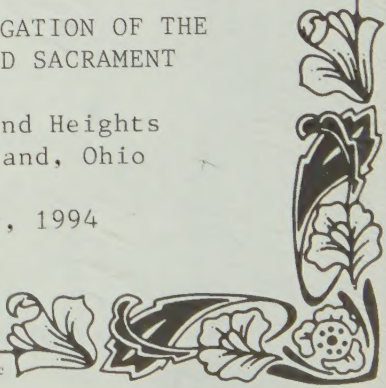
# Letters to Men

*Donated*
*To The Library by*

CONGREGATION OF THE
BLESSED SACRAMENT

Highland Heights
Cleveland, Ohio

Summer, 1994



© DEMCO, INC.—Archive Safe

HARRY J. FORAN.

The Catholic
Theological Union
LIBRARY
Chicago, Ill.

# ARCHBISHOP FÉNELON'S

## Letters to Men

LIBRARY
REGIONAL SEMINARIES
CLEVELAND 12, OHIO

# Devotional Works

EDITED BY H. L. SIDNEY LEAR

*Nine Vols.* 16*mo.* 2*s. net each*

**The Spiritual Letters of Archbishop Fénelon.—Letters to Men.**

**The Spiritual Letters of Archbishop Fénelon.—Letters to Women.**

**The Spiritual Letters of S. Francis de Sales.**

**The Spirit of S. Francis de Sales.**

**The Hidden Life of the Soul.**

**The Light of the Conscience.**

**Self-Renunciation.**

**Of the Love of God.** By S. FRANCIS DE SALES.

**A Selection from Pascal's "Thoughts."**

LONGMANS, GREEN, AND CO.

LONDON, NEW YORK, AND BOMBAY

# The Spiritual Letters

OF

# ARCHBISHOP FÉNELON

WITHDRAWN
The Catholic Theological Union LIBRARY Chicago, Ill.

*LETTERS TO MEN*

TRANSLATED BY

H. L. SIDNEY LEAR

Editor of "Fénelon's Letters to Men," "Fénelon's Letters to Women,' "The Spirit of S. Francis de Sales," etc. etc.

LIBRARY
BLESSED SACRAMENT FATHERS
HARRY J. FOLEY
CLEVELAND 12, OHIO

*NEW IMPRESSION*

LONGMANS, GREEN, AND CO.

39 PATERNOSTER ROW, LONDON

NEW YORK AND BOMBAY

1903

Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2026

https://archive.org/details/archbishopfenelo0000unse_m7c0

# *CONTENTS.*


| LETTER | | PAGE |
|---|---|---|
| I. | To One living in the World who was seeking Conversion | 1 |
| II. | To a Gentleman, concerning a real Conversion | 5 |
| III. | To One irresolute in his Conversion | 10 |
| IV. | The Difficulties of a Man of the World | 13 |
| V. | To an Officer | 15 |
| VI. | To an Officer (supposed to be the Marquis de Blainville) | 16 |
| VII. | To the Same | 19 |
| VIII. | To the Same | 21 |
| IX. | To the Same. On Meditation | 22 |
| X. | To the Same. On Meditation | 24 |
| XI. | To the Same. On Habitual Recollection | 27 |
| XII. | To the Same. On Ruling a Household | 28 |
| XIII. | To the Same. On Judging Others | 29 |
| XIV. | On the Danger of Self-confidence | 29 |
| XV. | To the Same. On Patience with Others | 31 |
| XVI. | To One in Sickness | 31 |
| XVII. | To the Same | 32 |
| XVIII. | Rules for a Christian Life | 33 |

| LETTER | | PAGE |
|---|---|---|
| XIX. | On Pride | 36 |
| XX. | On Pride | 37 |
| XXI. | A Fragment | 38 |
| XXII. | To a Courtier who consulted the Archbishop as to the Sanctification of Daily Life | 39 |
| XXIII. | To an Officer. On Meditation | 45 |
| XXIV. | To One who had recently turned to God | 48 |
| XXV. | Counsels to a Gentleman | 52 |
| XXVI. | To a Gentleman. On the Danger of Self-indulgence | 56 |
| XXVII. | To a Gentleman. On Meditation | 62 |
| XXVIII. | To One in Trouble | 64 |
| XXIX. | On Separation from Friends | 65 |
| XXX. | To a Young Man. On the Dangers of an Easy Disposition | 66 |
| XXXI. | To a Gentleman | 67 |
| XXXII. | To the Elector of Cologne, when about to receive Episcopal Consecration | 68 |
| XXXIII | To the Superior of a Community | 73 |
| XXXIV. | To an Ecclesiastic who had been reclaimed from certain Doctrinal Errors | 75 |
| XXXV. | To Père Lami, Benedictine. On Dryness and Deadness in Prayer | 77 |
| XXXVI. | To the Same. On the Caution needful in directing Souls which seem to be led in Extraordinary Paths | 81 |
| XXXVII. | On the Death of a Friend | 83 |

| LETTER | | PAGE |
|---|---|---|
| XXXVIII. | On the Death of a Mutual Friend | 83 |
| XXXIX. | Peace in Suffering | 85 |
| XL. | The Blessing of Suffering | 86 |
| XLI. | To One living in Solitude | 88 |
| XLII. | The Importance of not requiring too much of Others | 89 |
| XLIII. | On Sensible Fervour | 91 |
| XLIV. | To the same Person in Sickness | 91 |
| XLV. | Conscious Weakness a Source of Humility | 92 |
| XLVI. | To the Same | 93 |
| XLVII. | To One suffering from Depression | 94 |
| XLVIII. | To One given to criticise Others | 95 |
| XLIX. | To the Same | 96 |
| L. | How to deal wisely with the Faults of Others | 98 |
| LI. | The Trials of Self-renunciation | 101 |
| LII. | Patience in contemplating One's own Faults | 102 |
| LIII. | Self-love contrasted with the Love of God | 103 |
| LIV. | Hearkening to God only | 104 |
| LV. | Total Self-renunciation | 105 |
| LVI. | Absolute Trust in God | 106 |
| LVII. | The Same | 107 |
| LVIII. | The Same | 109 |
| LIX. | Watchfulness over Natural Temperament | 109 |
| LX. | To One in Perplexity | 110 |
| LXI. | To One in Mental Distress | 112 |
| LXII. | The Same | 113 |
| LXIII. | Resolutions not to be made during Excitement | 114 |

| LETTER | | PAGE |
|---|---|---|
| LXIV. | To One who seemed to be resisting God | 116 |
| LXV. | To a Gentleman | 117 |
| LXVI. | To One suffering from Isolation | 118 |
| LXVII. | To the Duc de Chevreuse. On Intellectual Dangers | 119 |
| LXVIII. | To the Same. On the Difficulties of a Busy Life | 121 |
| LXIX. | To the Same | 125 |
| LXX. | To the Same. Dangers of a Questioning Mind | 127 |
| LXXI. | To the Same | 129 |
| LXXII. | To the Same. The Claims of Business | 130 |
| LXXIII. | Contentment | 131 |
| LXXIV. | To a Nobleman on the Death of his Son | 133 |
| LXXV. | To the Duc de Chevreuse. Dangers of the World | 135 |
| LXXVI. | To the Same. At the Festival of Pentecost | 140 |
| LXXVII. | To the Marquis de Seignelai, concerning his Conversion | 142 |
| LXXVIII. | To the Same. On unreserved seeking God | 152 |
| LXXIX. | To the Same. The Benefits of Sickness | 160 |
| LXXX. | To the Same. Comfort in Suffering | 161 |
| LXXXI. | To the Same | 164 |
| LXXXII. | To the Duc de Chevreuse concerning his Son | 168 |
| LXXXIII. | To the Same. Some Rules of Life | 169 |
| LXXXIV. | To the Vidame d'Amiens. On putting an end to an Unlawful Connection | 172 |
| LXXXV. | To the Same. On returning to God | 173 |
| LXXXVI. | To the Same. On the same Subject | 174 |

| LETTER | | PAGE |
|---|---|---|
| LXXXVII. | To the Same. Exhortation to Amendment of Life | 175 |
| LXXXVIII. | To the Same. On Prayer and Meditation | 177 |
| LXXXIX. | To the Duc de Chevreuse. On Distractions in Prayer | 183 |
| XC. | To the Vidame d'Amiens. On the Dangers of Irresolution | 185 |
| XCI. | To the Same. A Warning | 187 |
| XCII. | To the Same. Discouragement to be avoided | 188 |
| XCIII. | To the Same. Earnestness in Welldoing | 190 |
| XCIV. | To the Same. Ambition | 192 |
| XCV. | To the Same. Yielding to God's Call | 193 |
| XCVI. | To the Duc de Chaulnes. On Distractions | 195 |
| XCVII. | To the Marquis de Fénelon, when on Service | 197 |
| XCVIII. | To the Same. On Patience | 198 |
| XCIX. | To a Gentleman. On Direction | 199 |
| C. | To a Gentleman. How to give up Earthly Help at God's Call | 201 |
| CI. | To a Gentleman. On Self-love | 202 |
| CII. | Patience with the Infirmities of Others | 202 |
| CIII. | How to bear the Absence of Fervour in Devotion | 204 |
| CIV. | On Meditation | 205 |
| CV. | On Meditation | 207 |
| CVI. | On Living to Christ | 208 |
| CVII. | How to bear Crosses | 210 |
| CVIII. | Laying aside Worldly Things | 211 |

| LETTER | | PAGE |
|---|---|---|
| CIX. | The Inward Cross | 212 |
| CX. | The Same | 212 |
| CXI. | How to receive Admonition | 213 |
| CXII. | Real Rest | 214 |
| CXIII. | Comfort under Trial | 217 |
| CXIV. | The Sensitiveness of Self-conceit | 218 |
| CXV. | Indulgence for other Men's Faults | 220 |
| CXVI. | To One in Trial | 220 |
| CXVII. | Advice as to ruling a Household | 221 |
| CXVIII. | To Nicolas de Harlai de Bonneuil. On the Death of his Son-in-law, the Marquis de Crèvecœur | 223 |
| CXIX. | The Value of Frankness | 224 |
| CXX. | Forgetfulness of Self | 226 |
| CXXI. | Resting Content in the Present | 227 |
| CXXII. | To One suffering from Jealousy | 228 |
| CXXIII. | On Conversion to God | 229 |
| CXXIV. | Humility | 236 |
| CXXV. | The Violence which takes the Kingdom of Heaven | 240 |
| CXXVI. | On Depression | 241 |
| CXXVII. | On the Thought of Death | 243 |
| CXXVIII. | False Notions of Spiritual Progress | 245 |
| CXXIX. | Christian Perfection | 246 |
| CXXX. | On the Right Use of Trials | 257 |
| CXXXI. | Peace of Conscience | 263 |
| CXXXII. | Anxiety as to the Future | 266 |
| CXXXIII. | On Direction | 267 |
| CXXXIV. | On Frequent Communion | 277 |

# LETTERS TO MEN

## I.

### To one living in the World who was seeking Conversion.

GOD'S ways are pleasant and satisfying to those who seek them in love. I am very thankful, sir, for the manner in which you have received my letter. God is certainly working in you, making you thus desire to know the truth, and to be assisted in your efforts. I ask nothing better than to help you. The more you do for God, the more He will do for you; and every step you advance in the right road will fill your heart with fresh peace and consolation. That very perfection of which people are so much afraid, for fear it should be an irksome restraint, is only perfection in so far as it increases the will to do right. And in proportion as our work increases, weariness and tedium disappear; for one is never wearied of doing that which one likes to do. When one does an irksome thing out of strong love, that love softens the hardship, and makes one willing to suffer. One would not be relieved by any shortcoming of that love; it is rather a pleasure to sacrifice one's-self to the beloved object. And so the nearer we approach to perfection, the more we are satisfied to follow that

which we love. What more would you ask than to be always satisfied, and never to bear any cross save one which is more acceptable than the contrary pleasures? But you will never find such satisfaction while yielding to your passions, nor will it ever fail you when you are earnestly seeking God. It is true that this satisfaction is not always a sensible and lively one, such as we experience in worldly pleasures; but nevertheless it is very real, and far superior to any the world can give: and that because sinners always crave that which they have not, while those who are moved by the love of God desire merely that which they have. Their peace may sometimes be dry, and even tinged with bitterness, but yet it is more grateful to the soul than the excitement of passion. It is a peace which makes a man at one with himself, a peace never broken or disturbed save by unfaithfulness. And so the less a man is unfaithful, the more he enjoys this blessed peace. As the world cannot give such, neither can it take this peace away. If you do not believe this, try it. "Taste and see how gracious the Lord is."[1]

You cannot do better than so arrange your time as to read a short time every day, with some brief meditation, reviewing your weak points, considering your duties, seeking God, and acquiring the habit of familiar intercourse with Him. Happy will you be if you learn what it is to find love an occupation. It is no use to ask what those who love God do with Him. There is no difficulty in spending our time with a friend we love: our heart is always ready to open to him; we do not study

[1] Ps. xxxiv. 8.

what we shall say to him, but it comes forth without premeditation; we can keep nothing back:—even if we have nothing special to say, we like to be with him. Oh, how much easier it is to love than to fear! Fear constrains, fetters, perplexes one; but love persuades, comforts, inspirits, expands the soul, and makes one desire what is good for its own sake. It is true that one always needs a fear of the judgment of God as a counterpoise to the passions. "My flesh trembleth for fear of Thee."[1] May my whole body be filled with Thy fear, O Lord. But if we begin with a fear which subdues the flesh, we must reach on to that love which comforts the soul. How good and faithful a Friend you will find in God, if you will but form a sincere, stedfast friendship with Him!

If you resolve to give yourself heartily to God, the main point is to mistrust self after the many experiences you have had of your own fragility, and at once to renounce all society which is liable to cause you to relapse. If you desire to love God, why should you seek to spend your life in the friendship of those who do not love Him, or who despise His Love? Why not be content with the society of such as love Him, and who will help to confirm your love for Him?

I do not ask you to break off entirely from all your friends, or all those with whom circumstances bring you into connection. But it is rather a question of close intercourse with those who help to soil the character, and almost unconsciously drag you down in spite of all your good resolutions.

[1] Ps. cxix. 120.

It is a question of diminishing frequent intercourse with vain women, who only study to please; and all other society which excites a taste for pleasure, tends to throw contempt on piety, and encourages a perilous dissipation. Such society is most harmful even to men who are established in good ways, and naturally much more to a man who is only taking his first steps in a right direction, and whose naturally easy disposition inclines him to go wrong. Moreover, you ought to take yourself to task for your long-continued shortcomings, and the abuse of grace of which you have been guilty. God has waited for you, sought, invited, urged, one may almost say forced, you to return to Him; is it not fair that you in your turn should wait for Him? Ought you not to mortify your tastes and restrain your habits of life, especially with respect to what is dangerous? Ought you not stedfastly to repent of past sins? and should not your repentance bear fruit in humiliation and self-restraint as to contagious society? "He that loveth danger shall perish therein," the wise man says.[1] Cost what it may, you must avoid the occasions of sin. We are bound by the law of Jesus Christ to cut off a hand or pluck out an eye if they offend:[2] that is, if they are a snare or stumbling-block to us.

I grant that you ought not to lay bare to the public the workings of a conversion which might call forth malicious gossip; true religion never requires such demonstrations. Two things are enough: (1) Never to set a bad example, and there-

[1] Ecclus. iii. 26. [2] Matt. v. 29, 30.

by never to be ashamed of Jesus Christ and His Gospel; (2) to do whatever a real love of God requires without affectation or display. In compliance with the first rule, you must attend Church services with all due reverence; and in whatever society you may find yourself, you must never flatter vice or take part in loose, unseemly conversation. In compliance with the second rule, your study, prayers, confessions, communions, and other good works, should be private. By this means you will avoid the spiteful criticism of the world without yielding to false shame or temporising timidity, which would soon drag you back into the torrent of sin. The most important step to take is quietly to withdraw from all amusements which you may have special reasons to dread, and to confine yourself to the society of a few select persons who think as you desire to think for the rest of your life.

## II.

### To a Gentleman, concerning a real Conversion.

YOU may think me indiscreet, sir, but I cannot use any reserve with you, although I have not the honour of knowing you; for what has been told me of your mental condition so greatly touches me, as to carry me beyond all ordinary rules. . . . It will be a great pleasure to me to receive you for a few days, but meanwhile I cannot refrain from telling you that we must needs yield to God when He urges us to let Him reign within us. Did you deliberate so much when the world sought to seduce

you through its passions and pleasures? did you hesitate or resist so much? Did you resist evil as stoutly as you resist what is good? When it is a question of going astray, being corrupted, lost; of acting against the inmost consciousness of heart and reason by indulging vanity or sensual pleasure, we are not so afraid of "going too far:" we choose, we yield unreservedly. But when the question is to believe that we, who did not make ourselves, were made by an All-wise, All-powerful Hand—to acknowledge that we owe all to Him from Whom we received all, and Who made us for Himself: then, forsooth, we begin to hesitate, to deliberate, to foster subtle doubts as to the simplest, plainest matters; we are afraid of being credulous, we mistrust our own feelings, we shift our ground, we fear to give too much to Him for Whom nothing can be too much, though we never gave Him anything yet: we are actually ashamed of ceasing to be ungrateful, and of letting the world see that we want to serve Him;—in a word, we are as timid, shrinking, and shy about what is good, as we were bold and unhesitatingly decided concerning what is evil.

All I would ask of you, sir, is simply now to follow the leadings of your inmost heart towards what is good, as you once followed those of your worldly passions towards evil. Whenever you will examine the foundation of your religion, you will easily perceive that there is nothing substantial to be said against it, and that those who oppose it do so only to evade the rules of holy living, rejecting God out of self-seeking. But in all honesty, is it fair to be so broad on behalf of self, and so narrow

where God is concerned? Do men need so much deliberation to find out that He has made us, not for ourselves, but for Himself? And what do we risk in serving Him? We should go on doing whatever is right and innocent as hitherto; we should have much the same duties to fulfil, and the same troubles to bear patiently; but in addition we should have the infinite consolation of loving that which is above all worthy of our love, of toiling and suffering to please a true and perfect Friend, Who takes heed of everything, however small, and Who rewards all sacrifice a hundredfold, even in this life, by the peace with which He fills the heart. And lastly, we must add the prospect of an eternal and blessed life, in comparison with which all here is but as a slow death.

Do not argue. Either listen to your own heart, in which God, so long forgotten, is now speaking lovingly, notwithstanding past unfaithfulness; or consult such friends as you know to be right-minded and sincere. Ask them what they find God's service to be; whether they repent having pledged themselves to it, and whether they think they were too credulous or too bold in their conversion? They, like you, were in the world: ask whether they regret having forsaken it, and whether the intoxication of Babylon is sweeter than the peace of Sion? No, indeed: whatever crosses may attend the Christian's life, he need never lose that blessed peace of heart through which one accepts every suffering, desiring no happiness which God denies. Can the world give as much? You can tell. Are men of the world always satisfied

with everything that comes to them, content without all they have not? Do they do all out of love and with their heart?

What are you afraid of? Of leaving that which will soon leave you, which is, indeed, already slipping away from you, which can never fill your heart, which turns to deadly weariness, and involves a hollow void, a secret self-reproach; which is worthless even while it dazzles?

What are you afraid of? Of following too much goodness; of finding a too-loving God; of being drawn by an attraction which is stronger than self, or the charms of this poor world?

What are you afraid of? Of becoming too humble, too detached, too pure, too true, too reasonable, too grateful to your Father Which is in Heaven? I pray you, be afraid of nothing so much as of this false fear—this foolish, worldly wisdom which hesitates between God and self, between vice and virtue, between gratitude and ingratitude, between life and death.

You know by practical experience what it is to waste away for lack of an inner life fed by love. A man becomes lifeless and without heart directly that he is without the indescribable something which sustains, upholds, renews him hour by hour. All that which the mad lovers of this world say in their frenzy is literally true after a fashion. To be without love is not to live, and to love feebly is rather waste than growth. All the wildest passions by which men are led away are but true love which has strayed from its rightful sphere. God made us to live through Him and His Love. We were

born to be fed and consumed by that love, like as a torch is wasted while it gives forth light. This is the blessed flame of life which God has kindled in the bottom of our heart; all other life is mere death. We must love.

But then, what will you love? That which does not really love you, which is not loveable, which you can no more grasp than a shadow? What will you love in the world? Men who are jealous, and fume with vile envy if you are satisfied? What will you love? Hearts as hypocritical in things of this world as the devout are accused of being in religious things? What will you love? A worldly dignity which may slip from you, and can give you no real comfort if you obtain it? What will you love? The esteem of a blind world, each separate member of which you despise? What will you love? This body of clay which fetters our reason, and subjects the soul to present sickness and approaching death? What then? Will you love nothing? Will you drag on a lifeless existence rather than love God Who loves you, Who seeks your love, and would have you to be wholly His, only that He may give Himself wholly to you? Do you fear that you should lack aught, possessing such a treasure? Do you not believe that the Infinite God can fill and satisfy your heart? Put not your trust in yourself, or in anything created; it is all a mere nothing, which can never satisfy the heart of man, made as it is for God. But never mistrust Him Who contains every good thing in Himself, and Who mercifully fills you with disgust for all else, in order to bring you forcibly back to Himself.

## III.

### To one Irresolute in his Conversion.

ALTHOUGH I have not heard from you, I can neither forget you, nor let go the privilege you granted me. Bear with me, then, I intreat you, while I set before you how guilty you will be in God's sight if you resist the plain truth, and keen perception thereof which God has given you. It would be resisting His Holy Spirit. You can have no doubt of the worthlessness of the world, its incapacity to make you happy, and the delusiveness of all its flattering promises. You know what the Creator's rights over His creature are, and how far more inexcusable ingratitude towards Him is than towards mere earthly friends. You feel what God is through all His wonderful works, and by the grace with which He fills those who truly love Him. What have you to set against such strong motives, save the love of independence and natural indocility which are at the root of your irresolution? You shrink from bearing a yoke, and that is the real leaven of the incredulity you hold up to yourself. You try to persuade yourself that you do not believe enough, and that so doubting, you cannot take up any step in the path of religion without temerity, and a risk of speedy backsliding. But it is no real doubt as to the truth of Christianity which causes this irresolution; on the contrary, it is your irresolution which snatches at this pretext in order to delay doing what the natural man shrinks from. People exaggerate their doubts to them-

selves in order to be dispensed from action, from sacrificing a worthless independence to which self clings jealously.

Honestly, what substantial defined difficulties have you to bring forward? Nothing save the dread of restraint, and of leading a dull, tiresome life; save the fear lest you be led on further than you wish to go in the paths of perfection. It is just because you are learning to value religion, to feel its due claims, and to see the sacrifices it inspires, that you are frightened, and shrink from giving yourself up to it. But, let me tell you, you do not yet know the attractive, happy side of religion. You see what it takes away, but you do not see what it gives: you exaggerate its sacrifices without perceiving its consolations. No indeed, it leaves no void in the heart; it will only draw you to that which you will learn to prefer to all that has so long enthralled you. If the world never exacted anything but what your heart could accept lovingly, would it not be a better master than it is? But God will take heed for you, wait for you, prepare you, give you the will before He asks you to act. If He restrains your corrupt inclinations, He will, in His Love, give you a taste for truth and goodness which will be stronger than all your lawless tastes. What do you expect? That He should work miracles to convince you? No miracle would conquer this irresolution of a self-love which fears to be sacrificed. What do you want? Never-ending arguments, while all the time you know in your conscience what God's claims are? Arguments will never heal the wound in your heart. You argue not in order to come to a con-

clusion and act, but that you may have more excuse for doubting and delay. You deserve that God should leave you to yourself as a punishment for your prolonged resistance; but He loves you better than you know how to love yourself. He pursues you in mercy, and disturbs your heart in order to conquer it. Surrender to Him, and put an end to this dangerous indecision. Such a seeming suspension between two sides is, in truth, adhering to the wrong side; and this assumed deliberation, which never ends, is the secret though disguised determination of a heart ruled by self-love, and seeking to evade discipline. You have argued too much already. If you still have any genuine, weighty difficulties, put them down clearly in writing, and we will go carefully into them together; if, on the contrary, you have only a confused sense of doubt, springing from reluctance to be bound by the rule of faith, why delay your submission? Silence your intellect. Need we wonder if the Infinite exceeds our weak, narrow minds? Would you measure God and His mysteries by your vision? Would He be infinite if you could measure Him and fathom His depths?

Do justice to yourself, you will soon do justice to Him. Humble yourself, mistrust yourself, be lowly in your own eyes; realise the dulness of your mind, and the weakness of your heart. Instead of sitting in judgment on God, let Him judge you, and confess that you greatly need His ruling. There is no greatness so real as this inward lowliness which knows its own measure; no argument so sensible as an honest confession of our own want of sense.

Nothing is worthy of God save a meek consciousness on man's part of his mental weakness, and a readiness to put aside his false lights. Nothing so enlightened as a humble soul;—when once it sees its own darkness, it will soon perceive the truth. Excuse my indiscretion, it is the result of your confidence.

## IV.

### The Difficulties of a Man of the World.

I PITY . . . very much, and quite understand that his position is a very trying one. He is beginning to turn to God, but is as yet very weak. He is obliged to fight against all his tastes, inclinations, habits, and even against sundry strong passions. His natural temperament is easy, and keen after pleasure: he is accustomed to continued dissipation, while he has almost as much to contend against from without as from within. He is surrounded by temptations and bad examples; all he sees leads him to evil, all he hears suggests it. He is removed from everything that might be good in the way of example or advice; and all this is a sore trial for beginners. Nevertheless, I must own that I cannot think it would be following the order of God's Providence for him to throw up his office hastily without heeding ordinary rules and consideration for others. If he is stedfast in reading, in prayer, in frequenting the Sacraments, in watching over himself with care, in shunning dissipation as far as his duties will allow, I believe God will take care of him, and not let him be tempted beyond

his strength. The events which God brings about through His love are generally prepared by an imperceptible and gentle providential course, which leads on so naturally that things seem to happen of themselves. There must be nothing strained or out of order: it is better to wait awhile and open the door with the key, than to force the lock in our impatience. If it is God's Will for . . . to retire, His Hand will point out the way. Meanwhile God will keep those who give themselves up to Him; He will hide them under the shadow of His Wings.

A man of high position and exalted office, intellectual, clever, and well versed in the ways of the world, ought not, after a certain age, to find it so difficult to follow a well-regulated, earnest life, as a young man whom every one feels at liberty to tease might do. But this must not be his chief stay: he must trust solely in God, and fear nothing so much as his own weakness. I should advise him to take every precaution against the dangers of his position, but not to give it up hastily. He should be on his guard lest he deceive himself: it may be that he is really aiming less to escape from what perils his soul than to attain an easier, more congenial life. Perhaps he is not so much striving to avoid sin, as the annoyances, worries, fatigue, and constraint of his actual condition. Such a tendency is very natural, and self-love frequently persuades us that we are acting for conscience' sake, when it is itself the mainspring of our determination. For my part, I believe God does not require so unusual a proceeding, and that seemliness forbids it: at all events, let him wait till the winter. Meanwhile, if

he is faithful to God, He will bear him up that he hurt not his foot against a stone.

Oh, how compassionate and comforting God is to those who go to Him with hearty confidence in their troubles! Men are hard, critical, harsh, never more than half-tolerant; but God bears with all, is pitiful to all. His Goodness, His Patience and Indulgence, are boundless. I pray with all my heart that He may supply our friend's every need.

## V.

### To an Officer.

HERE you are on the eve of war, and on the scene where it will probably begin. I implore the God of peace to reunite all Christians, and grant us peace. I also pray for your preservation; by which I mean not only that of the body, but the soul, and I am sure that you join your hearty prayers to mine for that. The contagion of bad example is not less dangerous to the soul than the risks of war are to your mortal life. All we see and hear is a risk to the soul, and may wound it mortally, unless God renders it invulnerable; and it is by prayer that you must win this protection. Prayer, in its turn, needs to be sustained by reading Holy Scripture; for our meditations, if they are to be worth anything, should be the fruit, not of our own thoughts, but of God's.

If you have leisure to study the Books of Joshua, Judges, Kings, Judith, and the Maccabees, you will be interested to trace the God of Hosts triumphing

over the pride of His foes, and guiding those that trust in Him with His Hand. These writings will show you that courage which is founded on faith, and teach you how to sanctify war. You will find examples of warriors who were faithful, humble, modest; who made ready to fight in prayer. You too must look to God as the Chieftain of your army, the Strength of your camp, your Buckler. "The Lord is my buckler," King David said (Ps. xviii. 1). Be strong, and fight the battle of the Lord. If you are stedfast in overcoming the world and your own passions, which are your direct foes, He will help you to conquer all the rest, and you will be able to say with David, "Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for Thou art with me." May God day by day fill you more and more with such a spirit of faith and trust.

## VI.

### To an Officer.[1]

You have forgotten me, sir, but it is impossible for me to forget you. Something in my heart continually recalls you, and makes me want to hear of you, as I have most especially felt during the campaign and its perils. Your forgetfulness only makes me feel the more. The friendship you showed me once is of a kind never to be forgotten; and when I recall some of our conversations, my

[1] It seems probable that the soldier to whom this and the following letters to XXI. were addressed was the Marquis Jules Armaud Colbert de Blainville, a brother of the Duchesse de Beauvilliers.

eyes are filled with tears. I trust that you remember how pleasant and hearty they were. Have you found anything since then more acceptable than God? Have the truths which then satisfied you failed? Is the pure light of the kingdom of God quenched? Has the world's nothingness acquired some fresh value? Is that which was but a wretched dream not still the same? Is the God to Whom you poured out your soul, and Who filled you then with a peace beyond all earthly ken, no longer to be loved? Has the eternal beauty, ever so fresh to pure eyes, no longer charms for you? Is that source of heavenly joy, of unmarred happiness, which springs from the Father of Mercies and God of Consolation, dried up? No, for He has filled me with an urgent desire, to recall you to Him. I cannot resist it: for long I have hesitated, and said to myself that I should only worry you. Even as I began this letter, I laid down a limit of discretion to myself; but after the first few words, my heart burst its bounds. Even should you not answer, or should think me absurd, I could not cease to speak sorrowfully to God of you, when unable to speak to you yourself any more. Once more, sir, forgive me if I exceed all due limits. I know it as well as you, but I feel irresistibly urged: God has not forgotten you, since He stirs up so eager a desire for your salvation in me.

What does He ask of you, save to be happy? Have you not realised that one is happy in loving Him? Have you not felt that there is no other real happiness, whatever excitement may be found in sensual pleasures, apart from Him? Since, then,

you know where to find the Fountain of Life, and have of old drunk thereof, why would you seek foul, earthly cisterns? Bright, happy days, lighted up by the soft rays of loving mercy, when will ye return? When will it be given me to see this child of God reclaimed by His powerful Hand, filled with His favour, and the blessings of His holy Feast; causing joy in Heaven, despising earth, and acquiring an inexhaustible fund of humility and fervour from his experience of human frailty?

I am not dictating what you should do. God will Himself make that plain to you according to your needs, so long as you hearken inwardly to Him, and despise boldly that which is despicable. Do whatever you will, only love God, and let His Love, revived in your heart, be your guide. I have often thanked Him for having shielded you amid the perils of this campaign, in which your soul was even more exposed to risk than your body. Many a time I have trembled for you: put an end to my fears, and fill my heart with gladness. None can possibly be greater than to find myself once more with you in the house of God, united in heart and soul, looking together to one glorious hope, and the Coming of our Great God, Who will fill us with the flood of His pure delights. Your ears are not yet closed to the sublime language of truth, your heart is made to feel its charms. "Taste and see" the pleasant bread daily spread for us at our Father's table. Why have you forsaken it? With such support, who can fear that anything else will be lacking? Even if you do not feel strong enough to regain the happy position where you were, at

least answer me, at least do not shun me. I know what it is to be weak; I am a thousand times weaker than you. It is very profitable to have realised what one is; but do not add to that weakness, which is inseparable from human nature, an estrangement from the means of strength. You shall regulate our intercourse; I will only speak to you of such things as you are willing to hear. I will keep God's secret in my heart, and shall be always, with unchanging affection and regard, etc.

## VII.

### To the Same.

PARIS, *Oct.* 14, 1688.

I WAS very sorrow, sir, to find you gone, on my return from a short absence. But they who know that everything is God's ordering are satisfied that He orders all for the best. I pray with all my heart that He will give you as much courage to withstand the world's judgments as He has done in the perils of war. Is it not a strange inconsistency that men should not fear the wounds which may prove mortal, and involve the soul's perdition at any hour, and yet be so timid, so cowardly under a biting sarcasm, or the criticism of people whom they utterly despise? Thus ambition—that is to say, the passionate love of a phantom—renders men fearless amid the greatest dangers, while their trust in an All-powerful God, and the hope of His eternal Kingdom, cannot strengthen them against the idle talk of a hateful impiety. What poor

cowards such men are, although they do pique themselves on their strength of mind and their courage! They do but drown natural fear with the excitement of pride and passion. Happy those who fear God, and so fear nothing else! Happy those who, sitting loose to this world and the blind praise thereof, know how to be equally fearless amid the dangers of war and the gibes of ungodly men! They find their all in God, and fear losing nought save Him. Death itself can but give them a crown: it is the end of their troubles, the beginning of their bliss. They no more think of being ashamed of Jesus Christ and His Gospel amid the world, than they would be ashamed to be sane amid an asylum of lunatics.

The chief point in which you are now called to be faithful to the mercy and grace which have been given you, is to let yourself be seen for what you are, a true Christian. Do not be ashamed of Jesus Christ, and He will not be ashamed of you in the Judgment, before His Father's Face. Of course it is right to hide from the world's sight much which should not be displayed; but it must know plainly that you mean to be a Christian, that you renounce all vice, and shun impiety. The real way to spare yourself troublesome importunity and dangerous temptation is not to be neutral. If a man sides openly with religion, there will be murmurs at first, but these are soon hushed, and the world lets him alone; evil associates drop off, and seek what they want elsewhere. . . .

God must love you very much to give you so keen a desire for what is right, and so much to up-

hold you, after so much falling away on your part. Watch, pray, mistrust others, and still more mistrust yourself, so that you may never lose the fruits of such tender mercy. . . . May God keep you, both in body and in soul.

## VIII.

### To the Same.

PARIS, *Oct.* 30, 1688.

YOU must not suppose that you are necessarily farther from God because you lose the opportunity of reading good books. When God gives us such an advantage, we owe it to Him to use it diligently; but when He deprives us of it, He will supply the loss in His Mercy. At such times He Himself becomes an interior book to us; He is with us in every difficulty, He lets us hear His gentle Voice in the depths of the soul, teaching us the vanity, corruption, and worthlessness of all that is without, writing a living, unchanging law in our hearts by His Holy Spirit. Be content, then, so long as you can do no more, with saying your Breviary carefully.[1] The words which touch you most in the Office will remain in your heart, and you can recall them amid scenes of dissipation where you can neither read nor pray. At such times the world will not be able to hinder you from realising how worthless it is; from lifting up your heart to God, to Whom alone you offer it; from invoking Him trustfully in

[1] The Minister Colbert had printed a Breviary adapted to family use for his own household, and it is probably to this that Fénelon alludes.

every need, from ruling your words according to His law. This, sir, is an interior worship which is unseen of the world, and which escapes its criticism. If any involuntary distractions break in upon such pious thoughts, do not be discouraged; take them up again quietly, place yourself anew beneath the Hand of God, and you will be almost as though you had never left it. In all such new beginnings make it a rule to lift up your heart to God, and to offer yourself to Him, at certain fixed hours, and in certain important actions. You will thus insensibly acquire the habit of living as in His Presence, and it will become easy and acceptable to you. . . .

## IX.

### To the Same. On Meditation.

PARIS, *June* 1, 1689.

. . . THE two definitions you make are so correct that there is nothing to add. It is certain that when the foundations are laid of a thorough conversion of heart, a true repentance, and a serious meditation upon all the truths of Christianity in detail,—not in theory alone, but practically,—some people so entirely adapt themselves to these truths, that at last they accept them simply and permanently, without needing to go over the groundwork anew continually. In such a case these great truths all blend into such a real and close drawing to God, that such persons find all they seek in Him. It is no longer the intellect reasoning and seeking; it is the will which loves, and plunges into boundless

good. But such is not your condition. You need to walk long in the path of a sinner seeking God. Ordinary meditation is what beseems you; happy indeed if God vouchsafes to let you tread therein. Go on, then, in the spirit of faith, like Abraham, not knowing whither you go; be content with your daily bread, and remember that in the Desert the manna gathered for a future day grew putrid at once; so true it is that God's children are bound to abide within the limits of His present grace, rather than to anticipate the designs of His Providence for them.

Meditate, then. This is the time for you to meditate upon all the mysteries of our Lord Jesus Christ, and all those truths which you have so long ignored and contravened. When God shall have altogether blotted out the impression of worldly maxims in your heart, and the Spirit of Jesus Christ leaves no trace of your former prejudices, then it will be time to investigate the leadings of grace in you, and to follow, not anticipate them, step by step. Meanwhile, abide in peace in God's Arms, like a child on its mother's breast. Be satisfied with thinking over your points of meditation simply and easily; let yourself glide on amid such truths as touch you, and which you feel to be strengthening your heart; avoid all mental efforts which excite the brain, and tend less to a pure, straightforward will to please God than to a perilous activity of imagination. Shun, too, all subtle trains of thought; confine yourself to simple considerations, and go often over those. People who pass rapidly from one subject of meditation to another only

foster their inquisitiveness and their unrest; they distract their minds by an over-abundance of ideas. You should give time for each truth to throw out deep roots in the heart; for knowledge is not the only matter, that which is essential is love. Nothing brings on indigestion so much as eating largely and hurriedly. Try to digest each truth leisurely, if you want to suck out its juices for your real nourishment. But there must be no anxious self-dissection: remember that your meditation will be good in proportion as you make it without stiffness, excitement, or anxiety.

I know well that you will be troubled by many distractions; but the only thing to be done, if you would keep attentively to your subject, is to bear them without impatience, and let them melt away every time that you find yourself wandering. While you do this your involuntary distractions will not harm you, while the unbaffled patience with which you bear them will profit you more than a more untroubled prayer, in which you would find greater satisfaction. The true way to overcome distractions is never to attack them directly and with irritation, never to be disheartened because of their extent or duration.

## X.

### To the Same. On Meditation.

PARIS, *June* 6, 1689.

I THINK that my last letter answered all your questions. The matter for you now is to occupy

yourself quietly with the subjects you have selected. This you should do as simply as possible, and to this end I would say:—Do not burden yourself with a number of different reflections on each subject, but pause just so long on each as it supplies food to your heart. By degrees you will get accustomed to look fixedly at truths, without jumping from one to another; and such a steady, fixed gaze at each great truth will tend to deepen its hold upon your heart. You will gain the habit of pausing on points out of liking and calm acquiescence; whereas for the most part people only glance at them with a passing consideration. This will be the true foundation of all that God may vouchsafe hereafter to work in you; and it will tranquillise the natural activity of your mind, which is perpetually seeking something new rather than diving deeper into what it has already accepted. All the same, it is not well to force yourself to go on meditating on any special point when you find no more life in it; I would only have you linger on it until you feel that you can get no more out of it.

As to affections [in meditation], accept all which the subject may kindle, and let them possess you quietly; but do not work yourself up to great efforts, which will only exhaust you, excite your brain, and cause dryness, because they would make you dwell too much on your own doings, fill you with a dangerous confidence in your own power of kindling your heart, and draw you too much to sensible satisfaction, so as to mislead you greatly in times of greater dryness. Be content to follow any affective movements which God may raise in your

heart through His truths simply and without premeditation. As to still more elevated matters, do not even think of them ; there is a time for everything, and it is most important never to anticipate. One of the weightiest rules of the spiritual life is to abide in the present moment, and not look further. You remember how the Israelites in the Desert followed the pillar of fire or cloud, not knowing whither it led them. They might only gather manna day by day, otherwise it grew corrupt.

The question is not how to go fast, but well. If one of your attendants was always trying to get on faster, you would say, "Friend, you will travel fast enough if you never stop, if you follow the route I have appointed, and arrive on the day I have fixed." This is just what God says to you, and how He would have you serve Him. No will, even in the most important matters, but to follow His Will. Now give all your heed to laying the foundations of the building, digging them out thoroughly by absolute self-renunciation and unreserved yielding to God's orders. That done, He will raise such a building as He pleases on this foundation. Give yourself up to Him, and close your eyes. This walk of faith, such as Abraham's, knowing not whither you go, is a very noble walk, and full of blessings. God Himself will be your Guide, and journey with you as He journeyed with the Children of Israel, leading them through the Desert unto the Promised Land. Happy you, if you let God take entire hold of you, to work according to His own views ; not your taste —whatsoever He will.

## XI.

### To the Same. On Habitual Recollection.

NOTHING need prevent you from making an act of recollection in the Presence of God when you are on horseback, and unable to use a book for special meditation. But you should mind: *1st*, Not to use such recollection instead of your meditation, or omit that, when you can so arrange your time as to make it before or after you go out; *2nd*, to add definite acts and reflections from former meditations to this one of the Presence of God, in so far as you can thereby quicken and recollect yourself the better; *3rd*, never to weary yourself with this recollection, but to relieve your mind by intervals of innocent amusement as you may find needful. I am sure that by degrees such consciousness of the Presence of God will become habitual and easy to you. As to your method of meditation, it is good, and you cannot do better than persevere in it. Be cheerful, as one who has found his real treasure, and has no further need of anything. Take the day as it comes, without anxiety; each day, as our Lord tells us, will "take care for the things of itself." Each day brings its own grace and help as well as its troubles and temptations. Talk freely with God; be simple as a child with Him. The more your will is dead to all the vain longings and unholy pleasures of the world, the more you will be alive to that innocent, childlike happiness which is far beyond the most gorgeous scenes vainly devised by the great ones of this world for their satisfaction

How weary and bored they are, poor people, amid their splendour! You will laugh at their folly, miscalled wisdom, in your true wisdom, which asks nought save God, and can enter in all simplicity into the joy of the Holy Spirit.

## XII.

### To the Same. On ruling a Household.

PARIS, *July 2*, 1689.

I DO not think you should rigidly carry out the rules you have laid down about games of chance. It is dangerous to make rules which are not really kept. In order to train your servants to faithful obedience, you should lay down no rules save such as you intend to have strictly obeyed, otherwise your authority will be lessened. I should forbid cards to your household, as they are liable to get excited over such games: quarrels, heavy losses, and not unfrequently dishonesty in consequence of these losses, are apt to be the result. But then to make up, I should supply them with draughts and other amusing games, so as to leave them without excuse for those forbidden, only I would not allow playing for money. With respect to the more educated members of your household, I should be less strict, dealing with them through persuasion, and letting them feel that you do not patronise people who gamble, or who do not know how to occupy themselves. In order to find suitable occupation for them, see what special gift each one has: let one write for you, another will do some

accounts, various little commissions, etc. etc. It is idleness which makes it so difficult to get rid of gambling.

## XIII.

### To the Same. On judging Others.

*Jan.* 3, 1697.

IN all things judge others as little as possible. It is a simple course to avoid all such judgments as are unnecessary. This is not indecision, but a simple mistrust of, and practical detachment from, self which should extend to everything. By this means one believes what is to be believed, and one acts when necessary, in all simplicity and without self-confidence. Outside this one judges no man, and one is ready to listen to others, to believe one's self mistaken, to retrace one's steps in childlike humility, if one has erred. Such childlike meekness is what I desire for you. It will bring you infinite peace, both to yourself and as regards your neighbours.

## XIV.

### On the Danger of Self-confidence.

*Aug.* 23, 1697.

I PRAY God to keep you faithful to His Grace, "that He Which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ."[1] One must bear patiently with one's self without flattery: submitting unweariedly to all that tends to

[1] Phil. i. 6.

conquer our tendencies and interior repugnances, until we become open to the impressions of the Gospel of Grace. But this work must be done quietly, and without anxiety; as, too, it should be in moderation, not aiming at doing everything at once. Try to discuss little, but to do a great deal. If one does not take care, one's whole life slips away in theorising, and we want a second career for practice. There is always a risk lest we fancy ourselves to have advanced in proportion to our theories about perfection: whereas all such grand ideas, so far from really promoting self-mortification, do but tend to foster the old Adam in us through self-confidence. Try to get thoroughly rid of self-admiration and your own notions of perfection: this will be a great step gained. Lowliness and mistrust of self with candour will be your foundation-stones.

. . . I would have you always on your guard against haughtiness, self-trust, over-decision in speech. Be gentle and humble in heart, by which I mean that your gentle manner should spring from real humility; harshness and want of consideration always come from pride, and he who would grow milder must learn to humble himself from the bottom of his heart. A humble heart is always kind and pliable at bottom, even when the outside is rough owing to a naturally brusque manner. Watch, pray, labour, bear with yourself without self-flattery. Let your reading and prayer tend to enlighten you as to your faults, to correct them, and to overcome your natural disposition through God's Help.

## XV.

### To the Same. On Patience with Others.

WHEN you are dissatisfied with X . . . on any matter, do not condemn her, or give way to your natural tendency to harsh judgments. Bear with her even in her greatest imperfections, and remember that your own are a makeweight. Often beneath a hard, rugged bark we find a vigorous tree full of sap, and bearing excellent fruit; and often a polished, attractive manner conceals much that is false and worthless. Bear with your neighbours continually, judge rarely, continually mistrust yourself, be on your guard against your likings and prejudices. Amuse yourself in your solitude without dissipating your mind, and without exceeding in any diversion. In your prayers give heed that you do not neglect consideration of the counsels of perfection, or of your own contrary defects; let simple affections have free course, and do not neglect such resolutions as may be suitable to your needs. . . .

## XVI.

### To One in Sickness.

I HEAR that you are ill, my dear son in our Lord. Your sufferings grieve me, for I love you dearly; but I can only kiss the Hand Which smites you, and I intreat you to do so lovingly with me. Formerly you misused health, and the blessings

it implies; now pain and weakness are a natural penance resulting. I can only pray that God may subdue your mind more than your body, and that while relieving the last according to your need, He may thoroughly enlighten the former. One is so strong when one ceases to think one's self to be so, and when only feeling the weakness and limited powers of one's own mind. Then a man is always ready to believe himself mistaken, and to confess it and correct himself: then his mind is always open to other men's light, he despises nought save himself and his own thoughts; he is not prone to hasty decisions, his tone towards others is deferential, he is willing to be criticised himself without resentment.

Such is the health, dear invalid, which I wish for your mind, as well as a thorough bodily cure; meanwhile suffer with humility and patience. God knows how glad it would make me to have you here, but the storm lowers more than ever, and it will not do to renew it through our impatience; so wait awhile, and whenever it seems safe for you to come, your presence will be a great comfort to me amid my troubles.[1] In delaying your journey I lay a heavier burden on myself than on you.

## XVII.

### To the Same.

BE more than ever watchful not to relax, to avoid

[1] The Marquis de Blainville's family connections would explain these allusions, as his visits to Cambrai might have seriously damaged his brothers-in-law, de Beauvilliers and de Chevreuse.

dissipation, and such society and connections as are likely to renew your taste for the world, or which might slacken your fervour. I often think of you with pleasure; but we must be content with such far-off thoughts, and with meeting through union with Him in Whom all distance is done away with. Do not see too many people. Yet neither would I have you weary yourself with study, with excessive solitude, or even with religious exercises. Do everything in moderation, vary and diversify your occupations, do not grow excited over any. Stop directly that you find yourself growing eager and excited. Mistrust your decisive, disdainful disposition; and directly that anything of that sort escapes you, try to alter your tone at once. Do not judge others without it is necessary, and meanwhile pass nothing over in yourself which is done with a view to make others think you better than you are. God will be with you if you heartily try to do all this. You will often fail, but do not be disheartened; begin again, and make up for the false steps into which you have swerved.

## XVIII.

### Rules for a Christian Life.

*July 25, 1700.*

I. Be stedfast in your religious exercises; that is, in reading, daily meditation, regular confession, and communion.

II. Let your meditation always be systematic, and suited to your needs, with a view to mental

humility and the repression of bodily sensuality.

III. Let your reading have a practical bearing, and tend to the correction of your faults. Apply all you read to yourself.

IV. Be careful as to the society you frequent habitually, and be specially on your guard as to the women with whom you are intimate.

V. Avoid harsh judgments of others, and let the recollection of your own faults hinder you from fastidiousness and censoriousness.

VI. Accustom yourself to withhold judgment in all things on which you are not obliged to pronounce. The habit of judging hastily, especially in an adverse sense, fosters rash judgments, presumption, a harsh, malicious criticism, reliance on self, and contempt for the opinions of others, all of which are out of keeping with the interior life in which gentleness and humility are needful.

VII. Shun the dissipation which sudden fancies always involve. Such an *engouement*,[1] to begin with, is too engrossing : it absorbs and chokes the inner life ; then something else takes its place, and life is spent in a succession of such fancies. When an *engouement* is in its first stage, let it cool down, and pray over it ; then when somewhat abated, use it moderately, and so far as will not harm you.

VIII. Never seek to change your position out of anxiety, depression, a false shame, or the itching

[1] *Engouement* is so thoroughly untranslatable a word that we have very much adopted it. No English word is a full equivalent for the absorbing, passionate devotion which makes some one person or thing all-engrossing for the time being.

desire to be somebody (*de faire un personnage*). All the states of life which you have not tried have their thorns and snares and weariness, only you do not see them from without. "Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof. To-morrow will take care for the things of itself." For to-day think only of to-day.

IX. The sacred profession which you contemplate requires great perfection in those who adopt it. A child brought up to it should be very innocent; a full-grown man should not leave the world to seek it without altogether extraordinary signs of vocation. Vexation at being useless in the world is not a sufficient reason for a man to intrude upon the ministry; he would probably find himself even more useless there than as a layman.

X. Hunting is a necessity for your health: this is a conclusive argument, so do not scruple about it. I have no fears as to the hunting; I am only afraid of the hunters. Do not let bodily exercise set aside moderate study. At one time you studied too eagerly, damaging your health, and even your inner life. Interest yourself in reading, without such application as is bad for your health; it will help to keep you from dangerous society.

XI. Endeavour to put your affairs in order, without letting your heart be engrossed by them, and without ambitious views.

XII. Do not omit any of your Court duties, which are matters connected with your office and common courtesy, but avoid eager pursuit of such undertakings as may kindle your ambition.

## XIX.

### On Pride.

*April* 4, 1701.

YOU must not attempt to come here at present, unless in the course of service. . . . You ought not to think of leaving the service at present. Ambition is a very dangerous thing; without it, in some degree, a man would soon grow weary, and with it he is likely to be led away. The thing would be to serve the King out of genuine fidelity to God, without seeking any mere worldly glory. Do not be disheartened by realising your faults. Nothing is so humiliating as pride when God opens our eyes to it and shows us its real folly. Anyhow, when you find out that you have given way to it, draw back, humble yourself, and let your conviction take a practical shape, otherwise your abhorrence of pride and love of humility will only be a matter of words. One chief point is to be straightforward and honest in the wish to amend; you will then put aside all evasions, false excuses, and self-justification. You will draw back and make amends, confess that you were mistaken and spoke too strongly; you will show that your pride is not deeply rooted, and that you suffer more from shame than those whom you have injured. Whatever arises from quickness of temper is mere infirmity, which must be corrected; but it is not the most dangerous evil. Pride comes from a more deeply-seated root—it is of the devil himself; and

where it is fostered a man will be insincere, harsh, bitter, cutting, disdainful, critical.

Be reserved with others, avoid seeking ascendancy over them, avoid derision and mockery. Recall the Presence of God; humble yourself before Him if you would be humble with men. Do not seek more from men than what you require for social purposes. Pray, read, and let your reading become a kind of meditation. Mistrust both your likings for the service and for the world, and do not dwell upon your notions of retirement, which are but a fine fancy. In a word, make as little as possible of all your fancies and notions. Confine your attention to the duties of each day, which are your daily bread.

## XX.

### On Pride.

ONLY a word, dear son, to urge candour more and more upon you, and that you avoid self-seeking, which is the cause of most of your troubles and faults. The simpler you are, the more docile and pliable you will be; and to be this effectually you should be so towards all who find fault with you out of charity. It is very acceptable in God's Sight when one is always willing to be blamed, despised, corrected! You are very dear to me; "I am jealous over you with a godly jealousy, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ."[1]

Be kindly, without pride or imperiousness, cen-

[1] 2 Cor. xi. 2.

soriousness, disdain, fastidiousness, or any other token of self-conceit. Be true and frank in spite of yourself. Be stedfast in thwarting your vanity and the sensitiveness of self-love directly that God points them out to you. "Walk while ye have light, that ye may be the children of light."[1] I pray that God may make you gentle, lowly, and childlike, as our manger-born Lord Jesus. Do not seek to be clever, or dogmatic, or keen to the faults of others, or sensitive and touchy, or to be thought better in appearance than you are in reality. Alas! truth is sorely belied in most that seems best in us. Refrain from all inquisitiveness which excites you, and be careful never to talk unnecessarily or ostentatiously about things which you know better than those around you.

## XXI.

YOU must wean yourself from the most innocent pleasures when God denies them to you. You are very near to me in Him—faith has a vision which sees dear friends better than with earthly eyes; and the true love which God kindles teaches one to embrace them in spite of distance. Suffer like one who knows the value of suffering with Jesus Christ. Take care of your health: rest both body and mind, and take comfort with God and your true friends in Him. Love me always, and be sure that I love you, as God teaches us to love.

[1] John xii. 35.

## XXII.

### To a Courtier who consulted the Archbishop as to the Sanctification of Daily Life.

I. How can I offer my common daily actions to God; *e.g.*, promenades, service at Court, visits received and paid, dressing, toilet matters, reading, history, etc., the business which comes upon me on behalf of friends and relations, amusements, shopping, and ordering equipages and the like? I want to learn how, by some kind of prayer, to offer all these things to God.

Answer. The most unimportant acts cease to be so, and become important, directly that they are done with the intention of conformity to God's Will. Indeed, they are often better and purer than what may seem more religious acts; first, because they are less self-chosen, and more according to the order of God's Providence; secondly, because they are simpler, and less exposed to self-complacency; thirdly, because if performed in moderation, and with a right intention of heart, we may find more means of self-abnegation than in actions where excitement or self have a larger part; and lastly, because these trifling matters are continually recurring, and furnish a constant opportunity for unobtrusively serving God.

We do not need great efforts, or much thought, to offer these actions which we call unimportant. The offering may be made with a momentary uplifting of the heart to God. Whatever He wills us

to do, and whatever belongs to the ordinary course of duties appertaining to our state in life, may, and ought to be, offered to God; nothing is unworthy of Him save what is wrong. When you feel that any given action cannot be offered to God, you may conclude that it is not suitable to a Christian; at all events, it is suspicious, and you should investigate the matter. I should not make a formal act of prayer about each separate thing: an uplifting of the heart at the moment will suffice. The practice must be easy and simple if it is to become habitual. As to visits, shopping, and the like, as these are liable to be pursued with self-indulgence, I should add a petition for grace to be moderate as a caution.

II. In prayer I am very inattentive: sometimes my mind wanders for a length of time, perhaps even without my finding it out for long. I want to find some means or system by which to command attention.

ANSWER. Perseverance in following your rules, and in recalling your attention directly that you perceive your distraction, will gradually win the grace of greater recollection. But meanwhile endure involuntary distractions with patience and humility; you deserve nothing better. Can one wonder if recollection is difficult to a man who has long been dissipated and estranged from God?

III. How, when with the army, am I to offer things which are over and above regular duty, both as to fatigue and danger, such as going into the trenches without being sent, out of curiosity, or the like?

ANSWER. Amid the perils of war it is natural to

reflect upon the blind fury of men, who destroy one another as though they were not already mortal enough. War is a frenzy issuing from the devil; but God nevertheless overrules it, and he performs a pious duty who goes to war not from ambition, but to defend his country. Thus God brings good out of evil. Consider, too, the worthlessness and frailness of what the world most admires. A bit of lead overthrows the most prosperous in an instant. But God guides it all; He counts the hairs of our heads, and not one falls without His express order. And while He thus deals with life, even death is not very terrible when He sends it to those that are His; it is a mercy to them, taking them speedily away from the midst of a sinful world. He crushes the body to save the soul, and give it an eternal inheritance. While a man does his duty in his post with all the intrepidity which faith inspires, I think he thereby acquires a right not to seek out useless danger beyond his providential calling. If there is any generally accepted need for all of your rank to meet danger in the trenches or elsewhere without being sent, at least I would have you not do more than what otherwise well-judging men do. Do not imitate people who pique themselves on doing more than others. It is a great stay in peril to be able to feel that God leads you into it, either in the way of duty or obvious fitness. Woe to him who is led by vanity; he runs the risk of a futile martyrdom. Do you do neither more nor less than what other brave and modest men do.

IV. Is it well to go on writing down my faults, for fear of forgetting them if left till I make my

special examination for confession? I strive after penitence as much as I can, but nevertheless I have never yet felt any true sorrow for sin. When I make my nightly self-examination, though I know that many much better people are troubled because they find so much wrong, I seek and find nothing; yet it is impossible but that there should have been many things in my conduct during any day for which I ought to ask God's forgiveness.

ANSWER. Your examination should be made every night, simply and briefly. With the good intentions God gives you, you will not voluntarily commit any considerable fault without remembering and accusing yourself of it. As to little scarcely-observed faults, do not be distressed even if you forget a good many. Writing down your examination may lead to scruples; I would stop it for a month, in order to see.

As to a lively conscious sorrow for sin, this is not necessary. God gives it when He pleases. A true, thorough conversion of heart lies in a hearty will perfectly ready to sacrifice all to God. By a hearty will I mean that the will is firmly and irrevocably set to withhold nothing within its control from God, and to submit to whatever crosses we may have to bear, perhaps always, in order to fulfil His Will. Such unreserved renunciation and self-devotion are the most real conversion. As to conscious sorrow for sin, one may be thankful for it when it exists; when one feels the lack thereof, it is best to humble one's self quietly before God, without endeavouring to force it, being rather content to be faithful in all things, and look to God in all.

You find fewer faults in your self-examination than those who have made more progress towards perfection find, because your inner light is as yet feeble. It will grow, and in proportion your perception of shortcomings will grow too. It is enough to seek to use your present light to the utmost, without being anxious, and strive to learn by reading and meditation. You must not try to anticipate what will come with greater progress in grace, which will make plain that which over-anxious search will not show you, or will show without being profitable for your correction. This would only tend to distress, discourage, exhaust you, and even to hinder you by continual distraction ; the time due to the love of God would be spent on a forced self-inspection, which would really foster self-love.

V. In meditation and reading I scarce can find anything to say to God. Either my heart is not in it, or it is not to be touched by the efforts of my imagination.

ANSWER. There is no need to say much to God. One often does not talk much to a friend whom one is delighted to see ; one enjoys looking at him, and one says some few words which are purely matter of feeling. The mind has little or nothing to do with it ; one says the same thing over and over again. One does not so much seek interchange of thought as rest and communion of heart with one's friend. Even so it should be with God, Who vouchsafes to be our tenderest, most cordial, most familiar Friend. In meditation we use brief, telling arguments with ourselves in order

to conviction, and with a view to practical results; and this is well. But with respect to God, a word, a sigh, a thought, a feeling, says all. Nor is it needful to be always in a state of excitement and emotion; often a very dry, bare, insipid, lifeless goodwill may be most acceptable in God's Sight. After all, we must be content to offer Him His Own Gifts: a kindled heart if He kindles it, or a heart faithful and stedfast amid dryness when He denies it warmth and sensible sweetness.

It does not always depend upon you to feel, but it does always depend upon you to will. So aim only always to will aright, and leave it to God one while to quicken your feelings and rouse you, so as to sustain your early efforts in the pathway of grace, and another time to wean you from direct consolations, which are as milk to babes, the better to humble you, induce spiritual growth, and make you strong in the faith, teaching you to win your bread by the sweat of your brow. Would you only love God when He fills you with conscious delight through His Love? If so, it would be your own pleasure that you loved while fancying that you love God. That which is done without sweetness, out of mere faith and duty, is far purer and more acceptable, although it may appear less fervent and zealous. Even when receiving sensible delight with gratitude, make ready in faith for times when it may fail you, and when you might altogether fall if you were leaning solely on it. It is well to lay up a store against winter during the abundance of summer.

I am omitting to mention certain practices which

to a beginner may forward the remembrance of this offering to be made to God of the common actions of daily life :—

1. To make a resolution to that effect every morning, and give account thereof at night.

2. Only to perform such actions as are fitting, due to your position in life, or necessary as recreation. In this way, by cutting off what is useless, you will learn to offer to God that which it is not desirable to retrench.

3. To make some such offering up of the heart when you hear the clock strike.

4. To renew such a mental attitude whenever you are alone, so as to be more likely to recall it when in society.

5. Whenever you catch yourself in excessive unrecollection, want of due reserve, or too free speech concerning others, recollect yourself, and offer to God whatever you mean to do in amends.

6. Look confidently to God, and ask that you may act according to His Will when you go into society, or engage in any pursuit which exposes you to commit faults. The prospect of danger should warn you of the need to lift up your heart to Him Who alone can preserve you.

## XXIII.

### To an Officer. On Meditation.

BEWARE of taking passages of Holy Scripture for meditation at random, it is tempting God to do so ; for although all Holy Scripture is "given for in-

struction," all facts are not equally calculated to supply direct and definite teaching, nor are all equally adapted to the requirements and needs of individuals. Therefore select such portions as are most suitable to your circumstances, and to the correction of your faults. Choose what will rouse watchfulness, trust in God, vigour in self-mastery, faithful performance of your appointed duties. You should add to this meditation some spiritual reading at another hour. S. Francis de Sales would instruct you, help you in detail, supply exercises, and teach you that free, hearty love which enables us to serve God cheerfully.

The Greatness and Goodness of God should be a frequent subject of your meditation: but you should not try to meditate without taking some special words, in order to fix your mind, which has been little accustomed to abide calmly in God's Presence; you will otherwise only lose your time without strengthening your heart. You should always have a definite, plain, simple subject, on which you should reflect simply. Ask chiefly to be drawn to God through the affections, for it is not by intellectual processes or arguments that He wins souls; it is by the quickening of the heart and the humbling of the spirit. Do not hope to attain to a point in which your meditations will be free from distraction,—it is not possible; but try rather to make use of your distractions by bearing them with humble patience, never being discouraged. Every time you find them out, turn yourself quietly to God again. Anxiety concerning our distractions is the worst distraction of all. A short half-hour

spent in meditative reading of the Gospels in the morning, and an evening reading of S. Francis de Sales' *Entretiens*, will be enough, as you have little time at command. Use the remainder of your spare time in studying history, fortification, and whatever else is useful to a man in your position. Never have an idle moment. The time in which you are doing nothing useful and good is the time in which you do most harm. Check yourself unrelentingly in all that tends to a lazy, idle, self-pleasing life. As to your actions, if they are good in themselves, reject all questioning as to the motives whence they spring, otherwise you will never have done, you will get worried, be disheartened, and while cavilling uselessly over motives you will forget to act.

You ought to resolve to lead a more active life, to see more of people in your own position; but you must be cheerful, easy, and affable—no shyness and awkwardness. Ask God to change your shrinking, reserved manner; offer yourself to Him when you go amongst others, but do not be dreamy and absent in society because you are secretly trying to realise God's Presence. Rather do what He requires of you at the actual moment; that is, be kindly and courteous. Gradually the recollection of His Presence will become easier to you.

Do not show forth your piety by a gloomy, severe, constrained manner. "Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty."[1] If once you love Him with all your soul, you will almost always be cheerful and light-hearted; but if you seek Him

[1] 2 Cor. iii. 17.

only in a Judaical spirit of fear, you will not find Him, but you will find constraint and trouble instead.

Do not omit going where others go; not merely into danger, but wherever you can show attention to your Prince.

Be a kind, obliging, frank, helpful friend: it will win others and lessen opposition. Let it be seen that you shun the debauchery of other young men out of real religion, and boldly, not out of moodiness or affectation. Plenty of cheerfulness, discretion, courtesy; straightforward, unaffected manners; few friends, plenty of passing acquaintance: care to please the really good, and those who excel in the profession you seek to learn.

## XXIV.

### To One who had recently turned to God.

YOUR letter is all I could wish; it tells all as to the past, and promises all for the future. As to the past, there is nothing to be done save to leave it to God in humble confidence, and seek to atone for it by unremitting fidelity. People ask for penance for the past; but what penance can be greater or more wholesome than to bear present crosses patiently? It is a true reparation for past vanity when a man becomes humble, and is willing to be laid low by God; and the strictest of penances is to do God's Will instead of one's own, every day and every hour, in spite of dislikes, weariness, and repugnance. Let us then only give heed to the present, and not even let our mind wander curiously

into the future. The future is not ours; perhaps it never will be. It is exposing one's self to temptation to anticipate God's dealings, and prepare for what He may not intend to send us. If such things should come to pass, He will give us light and strength according to the need. Why should we meet difficulties prematurely, without either light or power adapted to them? Rather let us give good heed to the present; a faithful performance of present duties is the best preparation for the future.

Now, as to the present time, it seems to me that you have not many things to consider. The chief matters, as it appears to me, are :—

I. I think you should give up not only all society which is likely to lead you into actual open sin, but such as may rekindle your taste for worldly vanity; or dissipate, enervate you, make you lukewarm towards God, cold in devotion, and indifferent to the counsels you so greatly need. Fortunately you are in a quiet place, where you can easily break from harmful ties and enjoy the liberty of the children of God.

II. It is not desirable, either as regards the duties of your position, or your own inner life, that you should plunge into entire solitude. Associate with people who do not excite you at the times when recreation is necessary; only avoid those who lead you to relax your rules, to dissipation, or who revive old wounds. Shun all such false friends, avoid them quietly, and raise what barriers you can between them and you.

III. You must strengthen your soul with the

Word of Life ; let your daily reading be both brief and prolonged—brief as to the number of words, lengthy as to the deliberation you give to it. Argue little and love much ; your heart, not your head, is wanted. Apply all that you read first to your bounden duties, and the faults you must needs correct in order to please God. Do not be afraid to put down your book when He fills your heart with devotion. You can read nothing better than S. Francis de Sales. Everything he writes is full of comfort and love, although his whole tone is that of self-mortification ; it is all deep experience, simple practices, high feeling, and the light of grace. You will have made a great step when you are familiar with such mental food.

IV. As to meditation, you cannot go wrong with the good intentions God has given you, unless by aiming at too much. Make it your habit to speak with God, not of the set thoughts you work out, but of the warm feelings with which your heart is filled. If you feel His Presence, and are kindled by His Love, tell Him so ; thank Him for drawing a soul so unworthy of His Love. At such times of sensible sweetness you will find no difficulty in pouring out your heart. But what, you will ask, are you to say in seasons of dryness, coldness, and weariness? Still say what rises in your heart. Tell God that you cannot feel His Love, that you are empty and cold, that He wearies you,[1] that His

[1] Eugénie de Guérin adopted this precept. She writes :—" . . . J'ai voulu lire, écrire, prier : . . . la prière même me lasse. C'est triste, mon Dieu ! Par bonheur je me suis souvenue de ce mot de Fénelon : 'Si Dieu vous ennuie, dites-lui qu'il vous ennuie.' Oh, je lui ai bien dit cette sottise !"—*Journal*, p. 75.

Presence does not move you, that you would fain leave Him for the idlest pleasures, that you will never be easy till you are far from Him and full of self! Only tell Him all that you know is wrong in you. Do you ask what to say to Him? Is this not subject-matter for plenty to say? While you are telling Him your troubles you are praying Him to cure them. Say, too, "O God, look upon my ingratitude, my lack of perseverance, of faith! Take my heart, for I know not how to give it Thee; keep it, for I cannot guard it for Thee. Lay upon me whatever external troubles and crosses are needful to keep me under Thy yoke. Have pity on me in spite of myself!" Thus you see you have always enough to say to God, either of His Mercy or your need; the supply can never cease. In either case tell Him unreservedly whatever is in your mind, with the simple familiarity of a child towards its mother.

V. Occupy yourself with your daily duties: controlling expenses, watching over the welfare of your household, over your children, fulfilling the just claims of society, so as to edify all around you, without ever talking to them about religion. All this is very simple, plain, and ordinary; it may all form part of a most commonplace life, but it all tends to draw you continually closer to God, and great will be your consolation if you follow it. "For one day in Thy Courts is better than a thousand."[1]

[1] Ps. lxxxiv. 10.

## XXV.

### Counsels to a Gentleman.

I AM not surprised, sir, at the revulsion you feel for so many things displeasing to God. It is a natural effect of the change in your heart. You would like a quiet condition in which you could be free to attend to what you like most, and escape from all that tends to reopen your wounds; but this is not God's Will. He chooses that the things which absorbed you too much formerly should now become wearisome, and serve as a penance. So bear this cross quietly as an expiation, and wait till God shall remove it. He will do so in His Own time, not yours. All the same, keep certain seasons for yourself, when you can draw closer to God. Read, pray, mistrust your own inclinations and habits, remember that we have God's Gift in earthen vessels, and, above all, strengthen your inner life with His Love.

Even when one has lived far from Him, one need not fear to approach Him with familiar love. Talk to Him in prayer of all your weakness, your wants, your troubles, even of the weariness you feel in serving Him. You cannot speak too freely or too trustfully to him. He loves the meek and lowly, and is ever ready to talk with them. If you are of these, let alone all your cleverness and your great things; open your heart and tell Him all, then wait and listen to Him. Place yourself before Him, so that He may put His Own stamp upon you; let your whole being listen in silence for His

Voice. Such silence to the outer world, to common passions, and human thoughts within, is essential if you would hear that Voice Which calls the soul to die to self and live to God in spirit and in truth.

You, sir, have great advantages in your acquirements. You have read a great deal, you know the real foundations of religion, and the weakness of all that can be set against it; but all this, which leads you to God at first, would hinder you after a time if you trust too much to your own light. The best and truest use of our own intellect is to mistrust and renounce it, and submit to God in simple faith. One must become as little children; there is a lowliness which is far above all greatness—happy they who find it! To argue, reason, discuss, and decide, is worth little; the thing is to love the One sole Truth and Goodness, and to abide firmly therein. Our minds will wander, but the will should be kept firm.

It is not a question of doing what is difficult; do the smallest and most ordinary actions with a heart set on God, as one who is seeking the sole aim of his being, and you may do whatever others do, sin only excepted. You will then be a kindly, cheerful, courteous, obliging friend; cheerful at such seasons and in such company as are fitting for a real Christian. You will be sober at table and everywhere else; sober in speech, in expenditure, in judgment, in your intercourse with others, in amusement, even in holy things, according to S. Paul.[1] The love of God teaches this universal

[1] "To think soberly, according as God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith."—Rom. xii. 3.

sobriety in the use even of all that is best with a most beautiful simplicity. Those who learn it are not constrained, harsh, or scrupulous, but they have a principle of love within which expands the heart and softens it, and without restraint or anxiety fills it with a sensitive care never to offend God, and checks it when there is danger of going too far.

People thus minded suffer like the rest of the world from weariness, difficulties, contradictions, ill tempers, bodily inconveniences, troubles arising from within as well as from without, temptations, sometimes from discouragement and faint-heartedness; but if their crosses are common to all men, their motives for endurance are very different. They know the value and virtue of the cross in Jesus Christ our Saviour: how it purifies, detaches, renews. We may see God perpetually in all things, but we never see Him so clearly or so profitably as in suffering and humiliation. The cross is God's Own Strength: the more it bruises us, the more the new man in Christ Jesus comes forth from the ruins of the old Adam.

Go on, sir, without making any external alteration, save what may be necessary either to avoid evil, or as precaution against your weakness, or to prove that you are not ashamed of the Gospel. As in all else, "let not your right hand know what your left hand doeth." Try to be calm and cheerful. If you can find some sensible, God-fearing friend, relieve your mind by talking to him of such things as he can appreciate; but be sure that God is the best Friend, and that no one comforts as He does.

No one understands *à demi-mot* like Him ; no one so enters into all our troubles, and heeds all wants without being wearied by them. Let Him be to you as your second self, and soon that will supplant the first self, and lay him altogether aside.

Regulate your affairs and your expenses. Be honourable, modest, simple, and disinterested. It is good service when a man serves from duty, not from ambition or eager hopes ; such service is rendered to country, King, and to the King of kings, before Whom all visible majesty is but a shadow. This disinterested service will atone for the pomp and passionate ambition of past campaigns. Maintain a consistent, simple line, without affectation good or bad, but firm in what is right, and so decided that there may be no hope of dragging you back. You will get off better, and be less worried when people are convinced that you are thoroughly devoted to religion, and that you will not yield. Those who are suspected of weakness, inconsistency, or insincerity, are sure to be beset with importunity. Put your trust, not in your own strength or resolution, nor in the best possible precautions (though these should be taken with all care and vigilance), nor even in any promises you may make, but solely in God's Goodness, Who loved you before you loved Him, even when you were basely ungrateful to Him.

You must make a rule concerning some good wholesome reading suitable to your wants and likings. Read briefly, pause, and meditate,—the latter without much argument, more with the heart than the intellect,—and leave God to impress your

heart with the truth you have pondered. A little food is very nourishing when properly digested, but it should be slowly masticated and thoroughly assimilated to be really useful.

## XXVI.

### To a Gentleman.
### On the Danger of Self-indulgence.

WHAT you, sir, have most to fear is self-indulgence and love of amusement. These two faults are enough to hinder terribly even those who are most determined to do what is right and to shun vice. Self-indulgence is the soul's languor, which numbs it and deprives it of all energy for doing good; but it is a very treacherous languor, secretly exciting the soul to sin, and hiding a devouring fire beneath its seeming slow ashes. You need a vigorous, manly faith to check this indolent softness unremittingly. If once you parley with it, all is lost. And moreover, it is as mischievous in worldly matters as in spiritual. Self-indulgence deprives a man of everything that might make him great; a self-indulgent man is scarce a man, he is a poor effeminate creature. The love of ease overpowers his best interests; he cannot cultivate his talents, nor acquire the knowledge necessary for a profession, nor undergo the regular work of a troublesome office, nor submit to the tastes and tempers of others, nor work bravely at the correction of his own faults. He is the sluggard of Holy Scripture, who "desireth, and hath nothing,"[1] who desires to

[1] Prov. xiii. 4.

do what is right at a distance, but drops back languidly as soon as he comes face to face with work. What can you do with such a man? he is good for nothing. Business wearies him, steady reading bores him, military duties interfere with his pleasures, even assiduous Court duties are a restraint. He would fain spend his life on a bed of down! If he works, minutes seem like hours; but when he is amusing himself, hours pass like minutes. His time slips away, he cannot say what he does with it; it glides past like water beneath a bridge. Ask him how he has spent the morning? he cannot tell, for he has lived without realising life. He slept as late as he could, dressed slowly, gossiped with any one who turned up, dawdled about his room, perhaps heard Mass lazily. Then came dinner, the evening went like the morning, and the whole of life like the day. Again I say it, such a man is good for nothing. A little pride would make a man ashamed to see himself such a poor creature; and a mere worldly consideration should be enough to fill him with disgust at his own folly.

Such a man is not merely incapable of any good, he is sure gradually to fall into great evil. Pleasure will betray him. The flesh cannot be indulged with impunity. For a time it seems merely indolent and passive, but all at once it will become brutal and violent; and the flame will not show itself till it is too late to extinguish it.

You must watch lest even your religious impressions, mingled with your self-indulgence, should lead you gradually into a way of life which, while externally well regulated, is hollow within. You

may think much of giving up the society of foolish early days, and not perceive that religion is a mere pretext in the matter ; you give them up because they bore you, because you are no longer in fashion, because you are not noisy and rattling enough to suit them. All this may lead you, through inclination, to a graver, quieter life : but beware lest it be just as hollow and unreal as the other. A grossly self-indulgent man, whose passions triumph over him, leads a contemptible, vile, wretched life, which even the world in its worldliness despises. In this way you may by degrees leave the world, not for God, but for your own passions ; or at least for an indolent life hardly less opposed to God, and which in the world's eye is more despicable even than the utmost depravity. You may only forsake great sins to be steeped in trifles and follies at which all save children should blush.

Now let us see what means you can take to guard against this. First of all, make a plan for employing your time, and keep to it at any cost. Next, let the chief feature of this plan be a daily half-hour spent in meditative reading, in which you never should neglect to renew your resolutions against self-indulgence. Thirdly, examine yourself every evening, to see whether you have yielded to self-indulgence and lost your time. Fourthly, go regularly every fortnight to some confessor who understands your tendency, and will help you to keep up a vigorous struggle against it. Fifthly, if possible get some good friend or faithful attendant to warn you privately when he sees that you are beginning to give way. To be able to profit by such warnings

you must seek them heartily, and let people see that you are thankful to receive them, and trying to make use of them ; never show vexation or pride when such admonitions are given.

As to your occupations, you should have a rule, whether you are at Court or with the army, and arrange everything so as not readily to alter. In the morning especially secure your reading and meditation while you are supposed to be still in bed. Read again in the evening ; and if you feel able to recollect yourself a little while when so doing, you will gradually get into the habit of making a short meditation then as well as in the morning. But at first do not tire yourself, so as to grow weary of your prayers. During Mass you might read the Epistle and Gospel, in order to unite yourself to the priest in the great Sacrifice of Jesus Christ, and some thought drawn thence will help you to keep your mind uplifted to God.

Mix courteously with all in the places where every one goes : at Court, in the King's presence, with the army, among the generals, etc. You should try to acquire that courtesy which gives a man a dignified deference towards all ; no self-importance, no affectation ; knowing how to treat every one according to his rank, reputation, merit, or credit ; rendering esteem to merit, confidence and attachment to upright ability, and due ceremony and form to dignities ; paying what is due to the world's external claims, courteous towards all, but intimate with few. Evil company is especially damaging to a young, and as yet untried, man. You need associate intimately with but few people ;

not at all with those who are notoriously unworthy. Do not ridicule them, but keep away from them.

Read such books as are suitable to your position; above all, your own country's history. If you mix civilly and socially with the world abroad, and have sensible occupations at home, you need not fear to live a retired life. Just as an idle retirement is unworthy, so a well-spent, active retirement raises a man above the do-nothings, who never even learn their own profession. If it is known that you work hard to leave nothing concerning war and history unlearned, nobody will presume to criticise your devotion; indeed, most people will not even suspect you of it, they will take you merely to be worldly wise. In this way you may escape mere idle society, and have time to give yourself to God and to the duties of the position in which He has placed you.

Not to say that you should never appear to esteem yourself above anybody, you should seek to have a certain simple, natural, straightforward manner, an open countenance, and kindly consideration in ordinary matters; in everything you should be liberal, noble-hearted, kindly, benevolent, quick to appreciate worth, ready to oblige, and regretful when unable so to do, delicate in meeting people half-way, in entering into their feelings, sparing them annoyance, suggestive, knowing how to enhance kindness by avoiding display. Worldly pride does all this in its own interest, and religion should turn the same road to its own ends, through higher motives. Nothing is so noble, delicate, grand, heroic, as the heart of a true Christian; but

there must be no insincerity, no affectation in him, nothing save simplicity, modesty, and reality.

So much for what concerns your public life. Then as to superficial friends: you must not reckon on such, nor use them save in urgent necessity; but be useful to them as far as you can, without creating too close a connection. . . . As to your true friends, they should be very carefully chosen, and consequently few in number. Have no intimates who are not God-fearing men, and ruled by the true maxims of religion, or you will be damaged, however attractive such may be. If you can, let your friends be somewhat older than yourself; this will tend to ripen your own character. Be quite open with real friends, unreserved save in what concerns others. Let your friendship be hearty, disinterested, constant, practical; yet never be blind as to the faults of your friends; let them always find you ready in the time of need, and never be slack when they are in trouble.

Treat your servants considerately, let your authority be at once firm and kind. Take pains to enter into their wants, to do whatever you can for them, to reward merit, and to attach them sincerely to you. Bear with their faults when not serious, and when they are anxious to amend, and only dismiss such persons as you feel cannot be trained into filling their position duly.

Finally, remember (and here I end as I began) that self-indulgence enervates and weakens everything, eliminating all power and life from mind and body, even from the world's point of view. A man who yields to self-indulgence is small and weak in

everything; he will be so lukewarm that God will reject him.[1] And the world too will do the like, for it will have nothing to say save to those who are brisk and vigorous. So the self-indulgent man will be cast out both by God and the world: he is a mere nought, ignored and despised. Beware of this fault, the source of so much evil. Pray, watch. Watch against self. Pinch yourself, as you would pinch one in a lethargy. Get your friends to prick and rouse you. Seek the Sacraments diligently, they are the fountains of life; and do not forget that in this case God and the world are for once agreed:—neither kingdom can be won without taking it by storm.

## XXVII.

### To a Gentleman. On Meditation.

CERTAINLY, sir, you ought to make a short meditation every morning, placing yourself in God's Presence, worshipping Him, offering yourself wholly to Him, and asking the Help of His Holy Spirit in what you are about to do. You know how we have done this together; it cannot be too simply done. Do not seek God in fine reflections or extraordinary emotions; speak simply, briefly, not in a studied way to Him—out of the fulness of your heart, as to a real friend. Take two or three considerations on the most weighty truths of Christianity. You can take them either from the *Imitation* or from the Retreats you have heard. Follow your own inclinations as to this, or rather the leadings of grace. . . .

[1] Rev. iii. 16.

I should read as little as may be, and directly I came to one or two important truths, I would stop to dwell upon them with recollection, and to work them into my heart after having grasped them technically. If afterwards I found my meditation getting too dry and lifeless, I would turn again to the book, so as to recall my subject and fix my mind.

At first be satisfied with a quarter of an hour for meditation, in case you become weary and dry; but if you find yourself able to go on for half an hour without tiring your head, do so. Generally speaking, it is best to begin with a short time, and gradually train yourself. You might do the same for another quarter of an hour at night, and so by degrees your meditation will become half an hour long. I assume that you will always proceed to make some practical resolution, ending with an act of self-abandonment to God, and of thanksgiving for the help He has given you.

As to your spiritual reading, which ought to be systematic, it should be for a good quarter of an hour, and very slow. Read on your own behalf; I mean, do not stop short in believing what you read, but apply it to yourself, and think over the practical results of every precept as concerns you. In this way try not only to gratify your tastes, but to digest this sacred food for your soul's nourishment. And moreover, it requires thorough mastication in order to be well digested; people who bolt their food quickly are apt to get attacks of indigestion instead of nourishment. It is better to read but little, and that attentively. Careful read-

ing insensibly becomes a sort of meditation, whereas otherwise it often drifts into what is vague and unprofitable. Too much variety in spiritual reading, as in other things, tends to dissipate the mind, scatter and waste it.

You might read with profit S. Francis de Sales' *Introduction to the Devout Life*, then some of Rodriguez' writings, especially one on *Conformity to the Will of God*, going on to S. Francis' *Entretiens*.

## XXVIII.

### To One in Trouble.

LET yourself go where God leads you—one while up, another time down—though such vicissitudes are a severe trial. If we were always in trouble, we should grow callous, or else fail under it; but intervals of breathing-time restore strength, and make the renewal of our griefs even sharper than before. As for myself, when I suffer, I can see nothing but unlimited suffering before me: and when the time of consolation comes, my natural impulse is to dread accepting it, lest it be a mere delusion which will make the renewed cross heavier. But I think real faith should take good and evil alike as they come, bearing all such disturbances patiently. The thing is to let one's self be comforted when God comforts, be overtaken when He overtakes, afflicted when He afflicts. While saying all this to you, I myself am horribly afraid of all that I know these troubles bring. I shudder at the mere shadow of the cross; but this,

if exterior only, and without the inner cross of desolation, dread, and agony, would be as nothing. I say this generally, just because it is strongly before my mind to-day. I am at this moment in a state of dry, hard tranquillity. I know not what to-morrow may bring. God will do as seemeth Him good; and whatever comes will be my daily bread, though sometimes that seems very hard and unacceptable to the digestion. Listen to the Voice of God, not to your own voice; therein is the true liberty, peace, and joy of the Holy Spirit.

## XXIX.

### On Separation from Friends.

I AM ever united with you and your dear belongings; do not doubt it. We are very near one another without meeting, while some people are far apart when occupying the same room. God unites all, and obliterates the greatest distance where hearts united in Him are concerned. In that Centre he who is in China or Japan and those in France meet one another. I do not cease to feel the privation of your presence, but we must bear it patiently, so long as it pleases God; until death, if it be His Will. Keep to your real duties; be quiet and recollected, diligent in your business, patient under your domestic troubles. May God's Blessing be on your household.

## XXX.

### To a Young Man.

### On the Dangers of an Easy Disposition.

I AM greatly touched by the kind letter you write. I see and value the feeling it shows. May God preserve you amid the contagion of the times. The chief thing for you is to mistrust your own easiness and your natural activity. You are more disposed than most men to be easily dissipated :[1] and when this happens, you are weakened. As your strength can only come from God, you must not be surprised if it fails you so soon as you fail towards Him. It is a great thing if God upholds us when we cleave to Him, but it seems inevitable that He should suffer us to fall when we are fearless of danger, and venture presumptuously from without His Shield. The only resource against our weakness is in recollection and prayer. You need this help more than most. Your naturally easy disposition is quickly stirred and made eager ; your liveliness and activity bring you to the surface ; moreover, your frank manners are attractive, and win the world's favour. Nothing is so dangerous as pleasing ; it satisfies self-love, and self-love poisons the heart. At first a man is amused and flattered ; then he grows dissipated, and his good resolutions slacken ; then he becomes intoxicated with himself and the world—that is to say, with pleasure and vanity. And so he finds himself afar off from God, without

[1] Fénelon uses the word in its original meaning—scattered abroad, dispersed.

courage to return, without strength to resist himself. Your only plan is to guard against dissipation. I intreat you to give a short quarter of an hour every morning to meditative reading, earnest and simple, and a few minutes of the same at night; from time to time during the day make an act of the Presence of God, and resolve to live for Him; humble yourself for your faults, strive heartily to correct them; be patient with yourself, without self-flattery, as you would be with another, and frequent the Sacraments regularly. I pray for you with all my heart.

## XXXI.

### To a Gentleman.

I QUITE understand what you feel about the excessive sorrow . . . feels for your faults, but it is not your business to decide whether such sorrow goes too far. When a man who like you has known God so long, and has received grace enough to sanctify a hundred sinners, yet falls into certain sins, you must not be surprised if the Spirit of Grace be keenly and long grieved in those who are bound to you in that same Spirit. You are vexed because God lets others suffer for you: you are vexed with . . . because she bears the penance which you ought to bear and yet reject; whereas, on the contrary, this ought to soften you, increase your confidence, submission, and docility. Perhaps you need this prolonged trial to make you feel the extent of your faults, and your real danger. It is the counterbalance to your levity; you need the wholesome

check of fear. Nevertheless, I beg . . . to modify her grief because of your great sensitiveness. I would not have her forcibly repress it in order to spare you, and flatter your self-love—God forbid! but I would have her led by grace only, not by mere natural feeling. I am delighted to hear that you see her progress; and yet meanwhile you fall back! O my dear fellow, if I could but see you, I would not spare you: I would humble you in spite of yourself! Lowliness is the only resource of the weak: a baby cannot walk, but it submits to be carried, to be put down here or there, to be swaddled; whereas a full-grown man who is weak, but fancies himself strong, falls at every step—he cannot guide himself, and will not let others guide him. . . .

## XXXII.

### To the Elector of Cologne, when about to receive Episcopal Consecration.

*Dec.* 30, 1704.

I CAN but obey your Highness by speaking with all freedom, and plainly, as you desire. . . . Nothing could be more terrible than to become a Bishop without realising the Episcopal duties. . . . The larger the diocese to be ruled, the greater its needs, so much more apostolic courage is needed to labour successfully therein. If you are to be a Bishop, Monseigneur, for God's sake beware of doing it by halves. You must be a man of God, the dispenser of the mysteries of Jesus Christ. The words of salvation must ever be found on your lips. It

should suffice to behold you to know how to serve God ; you should be as a living law, bringing religion home to all hearts. You must die to self, so as to lead others to the like mortification, which is the first foundation of Christianity. You must be gentle and lowly of heart ; firm without pride, and indulgent without laxity ; poor and vile in your own eyes, amid the greatness inseparable from your birth, a greatness to be dealt with on this ground only. You must be patient, and diligent ; full of mistrust for your own opinions, ready to prefer those of others when they are better ; on your guard against the flattery which besets the great, appreciating good advice, careful to seek out and promote real merit. In short, you must carry your cross amid all contradictions, and approach the ministry as you would the martyr's stake : "But none of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto myself."[1]

Thus to enter the Episcopate, you must be stimulated by a fervent love of Jesus Christ. He must ask you as of Peter, "Lovest thou Me?" And you must be ready to reply, not with your lips only, but with your heart, "Lord, Thou knowest that I love Thee." And then you will deserve to hear Him say, "Feed My sheep." Ah, truly, it needs great love never to be discouraged, and to bear all the crosses of such a position ! It may be easy enough for shepherds whose intercourse with their flock chiefly lies in taking its produce ; but it is very weighty to those who devote themselves to the salvation of souls.

[1] Acts xx. 24.

Your preparation, Monseigneur, should be in proportion to the greatness of the work you are undertaking. A mountain of difficulty impends over you. God forbid that I should discourage you, but he who would be worthy of God's Commission must be ready to say with the prophet, "Ah, Lord God! behold, I cannot speak: for I am a child!"[1] He must be hopeless in himself, in order to have full hope in the Lord.

You are naturally good, just, sincere, compassionate, generous, open to religion, which has struck deep roots in your heart; but the circumstances of your birth have accustomed you to worldly grandeur, and you are surrounded with hindrances to apostolic simplicity. Most great princes never learn how to bend sufficiently, so as to become the servants in Christ of the people over whom they are placed; nevertheless, those who would be pastors must devote themselves to serve. "We are your servants for Jesus' Sake."[2]

It is prayer alone which can mould a true Bishop amid so many difficulties. Accustom yourself, Monseigneur, to seek God within you; it is there you will find His Kingdom: "Behold, the Kingdom of God is within you."[3] Men delude themselves into seeking it far away; aiming rather to taste the sweetness of holiness than to submit reason to faith, and their own will to that of God. Speak to Him boldly of your weakness and your wants; you can never do this too plainly. Prayer is love; love tells all to God. All we need to say to our Beloved is that we love Him, and fain would love Him more.

[1] Jer. i. 6. [2] 2 Cor. iv. 5. [3] Luke xvii. 21.

"Nought save love," S. Augustine says. Nor must you only speak, you must likewise listen. What will He not say to those who hearken? He will teach them all truth. But we listen too much to our own voice to hear Him; let us rather be silent and hear God: "I will hearken what the Lord God will say concerning me."[1] We understand the silence of the lips, but not that of the heart. Real prayer, though brief, would spread itself by degrees over all the day's doings: it would give a vivid sense of God's Presence, Which would renew the strength perpetually; it would rule the exterior and interior; through it one would act solely through the Spirit of Grace; there would be no following natural impetuosities, nor over-eagerness, nor the impulses of self-love; one's firmness would not be hard or proud, nor one's indulgence weak or lax; one would avoid all excess, all indiscretion, all affectation, all singularity; one would do much the same things that one does now, only one would do them much better, with the satisfaction of doing them for God instead of to please one's self.

I think, Monseigneur, you might profitably read S. Paul's Epistles to Timothy and Titus, S. Gregory's Pastoral, S. Chrysostom's writings on the Priesthood, some of S. Augustine's sermons and epistles, S. Bernard's *De Consideratione*, and some of his letters to Bishops, the *Life of S. Charles*, the *Life and Works of S. Francis de Sales*. You know, Monseigneur, that, in order to read profitably, you must think more of learning than of gratifying

[1] Ps. lxxxv. 8.

curiosity. It is better to read but little, so as to have time to ponder, appreciate, and apply what you read. You should try to turn your reading into a sort of meditation. To such purely devotional reading you might add the Council of Trent and the Catechism, which is an abridgment of theology. Fleury's well-written *History of the Church* is both useful and agreeable reading.

Finally, the man of God, "ready unto every good work," needs to feed frequently on the Bread of Heaven Which came down to give life to the world, and therefore you need to prepare, by unreserved self-devotion, to receive so great a Gift. An enlightened confessor, who is experienced in the things of God, will regulate fitting seasons, giving heed alike to the needs and attainments of a soul. He should not permit such frequent Communion to beginners as to those farther advanced: but when a soul is obedient to grace, clings to nothing which would keep it back, and strives only to be stedfast, it is well, in permitting Communion, not merely to weigh its actual merits, but the earnest desire it has to overcome faults.

To live thus, Monseigneur, you must keep certain hours to yourself for retirement, so far as propriety, the great claims of your position, and your need of due relaxation, will allow. . . . Our Lord has said, "Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof; the morrow will take care for the things of itself." . . . It seems to me you should now think of nothing save your due preparation, as though you were to be consecrated next month, nevertheless postponing your consecration as long as may be

necessary for the sanctity of the ministry, for your own salvation, and that of your people. I am, etc.

## XXXIII.

### To the Superior of a Community.

YOU are led away, sir, by the quickness of your feelings. You did not put yourself into your present position ; Providence placed you there. God never requires what is impossible, and you will only be called to give account for that which you can do. They misunderstand Him who say with the slothful servant, "I know Thee that Thou art an hard man, reaping where Thou hast not sown."

All who govern will come into contact with some refractory minds which refuse to bear the yoke. If you would win those under you to God, do not begin by rigidly adhering to an over-strict rule ; you will never succeed with minds unaccustomed to the yoke. Rather make yourself loved, and let it be felt that you love God. Accustom those under you to confide their infirmities to you ; show them a father's kindness, and as much indulgence as your essential rules will admit. Deal with each according to his need. Govern not by general rules so much as by adapting yourself to individual wants. Make yourself all things to all men through the perceptions of grace, bearing with the weak while perfecting the strong. One can often see to the end of one's authority, and by carrying it too far one would only cause revolution.

It is well to bear in mind from whence those

under you have come, so as to be content with little. Not that I would have you neglect any part of God's Law, or the rules of your Community; but one must learn to tolerate what cannot be hindered —to wait, to hope, to point to a far-off goal, and encourage those who scarcely venture to look forward so far, helping them gradually to make the first needful steps. God's Blessing will be upon such a patient, kindly government. It is a real work of faith, toiling amid darkness without seeing the fruit of your labour. You only see your inferior's indolence, complaining, division, misunderstanding, contradictions; but amid all these briers, which seem to cover the whole ground, there is some fruitful seed, and it is for the sake of this seed that God subjects us to so many trials. I earnestly hope that your heart will find rest amid your duties, and that, while effecting such good as the state of things will admit of, you will abide quietly till God prepares the minds of those around you for a fuller and more effectual improvement. One must deal with every one according to his special prejudice; and after trying to put forward the truth, we must wait for it to effect that which we cannot do of ourselves, namely, to convince men and win their hearts.

So be it your part to do what you can day by day, and do not affect to promote God's Glory beyond what He sees good to permit. Be content with the daily bread He wills to you; what more would you have? Read, but give the preference to meditation over scientific reading. I would fain see you caring little for "knowledge which puffeth

up," and living rather in that "charity which edifieth." Check the curiosity of a worldly mind by recollection, and the habitual sense of God's Presence; hush your too lively imagination, in order that you may listen to God. In prayer alone you will find wisdom, courage, patience, gentleness, firmness, the art of ruling others. There only you will learn how to govern well. In the silence of prayer God will take away your mind, and fill you solely with His Own. He alone must be all in all. When He reigns absolutely among you, He will reach from one extremity to the other with gentle force. Therefore pray about everything; you cannot pray too much. If you decide or act without prayer, your self-will is sure to disturb you much, to involve you in many annoyances, to cause you harassing doubts and misgivings, so that you will waste your strength for nothing; but if faithful to prayer, what else is a purgatory will become an earthly paradise, while you will do more good in one peaceful day than in a month of hurry and disturbance. Do not think about distance; those who are united in God are always together, while such as live under the same roof without such union are infinitely far apart.

## XXXIV.

### To an Ecclesiastic who had been reclaimed from certain Doctrinal Errors.

CAMBRAI, *Sept.* 11, 1708.

I AM rejoiced, sir, to hear from yourself how

diligently you have sought the truth, in spite of former prejudices. This straightforward line will bring a real blessing on you personally, as well as on your ministry, and therefore on your flock. Nothing is so important as simplicity and a sincere mistrust of self. If everybody were intent upon prayer, recollection, charity, freedom from self-conceit, and the renunciation of an empty reputation for wit and learning, all disputes would be soon set at rest. Our Lord said to the Jews, "How can ye believe, which receive honour one of another, and seek not the honour that cometh of God only?"[1] And He went on to say, "If any man will do His Will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I speak of Myself."[2] Thus we see that those who mislead others and go astray themselves do so for lack of seeking God's Will with a humble heart, and in submission to the Church. Heresy only tempts them because they open the door to it by vanity, curiosity, presumption, and dissipation. It is lack of recollection and of self-abnegation which fosters contentious spirits and raises up the founders of heresies and innovations; and therefore it is that S. Cyprian says, "Let no one imagine that they can be good men who leave the Church. Wind does not take the wheat, nor do storms overthrow the tree that has a solid root to rest on. It is the light straw that the tempest tosses. . . . Thus are the faithful approved, thus the false detected; thus, even here, before the Day of Judgment, the souls of the righteous and unrighteous are divided, the chaff

[1] John v. 44. [2] John vii. 17.

separated from the wheat."[1] Experience proves this visibly. Who are the founders of schisms and heresies? Men who are learned, inquiring, critical, full of their own talents, kindled with a sharp, pharisaical zeal for reform, contemptuous, indocile, imperious. They may be highly moral, and possess a rigid, proud courage, a bitter zeal against abuses, unremitting application to study and discipline; but you will find no gentleness, forbearance, patience, humility, or true spirit of prayer among them.

"I thank Thee, O Father, Lord of Heaven and earth," said our Lord Jesus Christ, "because Thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes."[2] And He has also said, "If the son of peace be there, your peace shall rest upon him."[3] I am ever most sincerely yours, etc.

## XXXV.

### To Père Lami, Benedictine.
### On Dryness and Deadness in Prayer.

TOURNAI, *Oct.* 26, 1701.

FORGIVE me, Reverend Father, for not having answered your question. . . . What I think about the matter is simply this:—

Our body merely requires nourishment; it is enough for the ruling soul to be conscious of its needs, and the effecting of what is necessary is

[1] *De Unit. Eccles.: Library of the Fathers*, vol. iii. Treat. V. p. 138.

[2] Matt. xi. 25.

[3] Luke x. 6.

made easy by the satisfaction thereby created. As to the soul, it has a further want. If it were altogether simple, it too might receive and rightly use a conscious strength ; but being diseased, so to say, through self-love, it is needful that God should conceal its strength, its growth, and good desires. Or if permitted to see these, it is but a faint perception, so vague that the soul cannot rely on them ; yet even so, it is prone to view such gifts with vain self-complacency, in spite of the humiliating uncertainty. What would it not do were it able clearly to behold the grace which inspires it, and a faithful correspondence thereto? Therefore it is that God does two things for the soul, while He does but one for the body. To this latter He gives nourishment, together with hunger and pleasure in eating, all of which are sensible. But to the soul He gives the hunger of desire, and food ; but while giving these gifts He hides them, lest the soul derive self-complacency through them. And thus, when purifying us with trial, He deprives us of delight, of sensible fervour, of acute conscious desires. As the soul in its pride turned all sensible power to poison, God reduces it to feel nought save languor, distaste, weakness, temptation. Not but that it does always receive real help ; it is warmed, kindled, upheld in perseverance, but without the conscious enjoyment of all this, which is a very different thing from the fact. Prayer is not at all the same thing as the conscious pleasure which often is its accompaniment. Saint Teresa observes that many souls give up prayer directly that they cease to find sensible pleasure in it, whereas this is to give up

prayer just when it is in the way to be perfected. True prayer is not a matter of sense or imagination, but of the mind and will. But one may easily make mistakes in speaking of pleasure and delight. There is a pleasure altogether vague and indeliberate, which does not proceed from the will; and there is a deliberate pleasure, which is neither more nor less than a stedfast will. And this delight which comes of the deliberate will is that of which the Psalmist says, "Delight thou in the Lord, and He shall give thee thy heart's desire."[1] This delight is inseparable from all real prayer, because it is in itself prayer; but this which is of the will is not always accompanied by that other delight, which is involuntary and sensible. The former may be most real, and yet not give any sensible consolation; and thus sometimes souls most severely tried may retain the delight of the will in an utterly dry prayer without conscious pleasure. Otherwise we should be reduced to say that souls are only perfected in God's Ways in proportion as they feel their pleasure in virtue increasing, and that all souls deprived of sensible pleasure by trial have lost the love of God, and are under delusion. This would be to upset everything, and measure all piety by the imagination, a proceeding which would tend to the most dangerous fanaticism, every one deciding his own degree of perfection by the degree of his pleasure and taste. Moreover, this is really done by some souls unconsciously; they seek nothing save pleasure and satisfaction in prayer, and give themselves up to feeling, believing nothing to

[1] Ps. xxxvii. 4.

be real but what they feel and imagine—becoming mere enthusiasts. If they have a fit of fervour, they will enter upon and deal with anything; nothing stops them, no authority can restrain them. But if this sensible fervour dies out, forthwith such souls are disheartened, grow slack, and fall away. They must be perpetually beginning again; they turn like a weathercock with every wind; they only follow Jesus Christ for the miraculous loaves and fishes; they demand quails in the desert; they are for ever crying out, like S. Peter on Mount Tabor, "It is good for us to be here!" Happy that soul which is faithful alike in sensible abundance and in the most severe privation; it "shall be even as Mount Sion, which may not be removed, but standeth fast for ever."[1] It eats the daily bread of pure faith, neither seeking the enjoyment of which God deprives it, nor the sight of what He conceals; it is content to believe what the Church has taught it, to love God with a simple will, and to do, at all costs, whatever the Gospel commands or counsels. If satisfaction [in prayer] is given, it accepts it as a help to its own weakness; if not, it bears the privation quietly, and loves on. Clinging to what is sensible leads at one time to discouragement, at another to illusion. He who loses his sensible delectation without any fault of his own only suffers as a child when his mother weans him: dry bread is less pleasant but more strengthening than milk: a tutor's correction is more profitable than the fondling of a nurse.

But let us put aside philosophic discussion as to

[1] Ps. cxxv. 1.

the cause, and dwell only upon the result. We may be sure that we never need to pray so earnestly as when we cannot lay hold of any pleasure in prayer; that is the season of probation and temptation, and consequently the time for most earnest recourse to God in urgent prayer. On the other hand, it is well to accept all sensible fervour very simply, as given to feed, comfort, strengthen the soul, never reckoning upon such sweetness, wherein imagination often has its share in flattering us. Let us follow Jesus Christ to His Cross like S. John; in so doing we shall never be deceived. S. Peter was in a sort of illusion on Mount Tabor. It is easy to say to one's self, "I love God with all my heart," when conscious of nought save pleasure in such love; but true love is that which suffers while loving: "Though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him."

## XXXVI.

### To the Same.

ON THE CAUTION NEEDFUL IN DIRECTING SOULS WHICH SEEM TO BE LED IN EXTRAORDINARY PATHS.

I CANNOT pretend, Reverend Father, to form any opinion as to the sincerity of the person in question, or to judge of the things she professes to experience; you, who have watched the details, can judge much better than I, who have seen nothing. But, generally speaking, I should fear that reading about extraordinary matters has affected a weak imagination to excess. Moreover, self-love easily flatters itself that it has attained the altitudes

which it has admired in books. It seems to me that the only course to be taken is to guide such persons without taking any notice of such things, and oblige them never to dwell voluntarily on such. This is the real way of discovering how much self-conceit has to do with these supposed gifts. Nothing tends so much to pique self-conceit, and bring illusions to light, as a simple direction which sets aside the marvellous, and requires the person who aspires to it to act as though nothing of the sort existed. Without such a test, I do not think you can pretend to have proved a person thoroughly, or to have taken due precautions against illusion. In thus obliging any one not to dwell voluntarily on extraordinary occurrences, you will only be following the rule given by the Blessed John of the Cross, to look beyond such light, and to abide in the twilight of simple faith. If the gifts be real, such detachment will not hinder them from leaving their mark upon the soul; if not, such uncompromising faith will be a sure guarantee against illusion. Moreover, such a line will not keep back the soul from God's true leadings, for there is no opposition. It can only vex self-conceit, which finds a hidden complacency in such unusual gifts: and that self-conceit is the very thing which needs pruning. Or even if such gifts are unquestionably real and good, it is most important for the soul to learn detachment from them, and to live by simple faith. However excellent the gifts may be, detachment from them is better still. "And yet show I you a more excellent way"—the way of faith and love; not clinging

either to sight, feeling, or taste, only to obedience to the Beloved One. Such a way is simple, real, straightforward, free from the snares of pride. Such bare simplicity keeps the soul from stopping short in aught save God. . . .

## XXXVII.

### On the Death of a Friend.

God has taken what is His: surely He has done all things well! It was time that F . . . should rest from his many troubles; they have been great, and he never spared himself. There was no thought of himself, only of the Will of Him Who ordered all. Crosses are only blessed to us in so far as we give ourselves up to them unreservedly and forgetting self. So, dear sir, seek to forget yourself, else all suffering is useless. God does not lay suffering on us merely that we may suffer, but that we may die to self by dint of putting it aside under the most difficult of all circumstances, viz., pain. I sympathise with the good Abbé's loss in F . . . ; I know how united they were. Such a death has nothing save what is happy in it. He is nearer to us than he was. There is no curtain to hide him now; even the veil of faith is lifted for those who are full of pure, disinterested love.

## XXXVIII.

### On the Death of a mutual Friend.

God has fulfilled His Will: He has taken what is

His, and has deprived you of what was not yours. You yourself are wholly His. I know that you desire to be so, and to that end you must sacrifice everything when the occasion offers. He was caring for your best interests when He took our dear A . . . to Himself: the suddenness of the event is a Providential way of sparing him temptation. When God has brought His work to the point He chooses, He confirms the holy will which He has inspired, and sets His children free from all uncertainties. He veils the last sacrifice in order to spare them the dread of it. Let us leave Him to do as He will, and turn straight to Him. Do not give ear to yourself: mistrust your rather morbid temperament, and still more your too reflective mind.

I am in a state of very bitter peace, and I wish you all the peace without the bitterness. It is impossible for me to tell you more about myself. I do not understand my own condition; whatever I try to say seems unreal. Often death would be a consolation; often I am cheerful, and amused with everything. As to telling you the reason of one or the other, it is what I cannot do, for I have no real reasons. But taking everything into consideration, I believe that I am where I ought to be, and do not let myself remember that there is anywhere else in the world than the place to which my duties bind me. If I could see you, I should rejoice; but not being able to do so, it is enough to be ever near you in spirit, in spite of distance. Let us continue thus united so long as God's Providence wills us to be so separated.

## XXXIX.

### Peace in Suffering.

As to N . . . , I pray that our Lord may give her that simplicity which would be a root of peace to her. When we learn stedfastly to put aside all restless, unnecessary anxiety, which springs from a love of self very different from true love, we shall have attained the very heart of the narrow way, and, lacking in nothing towards God or man, we shall enjoy the pure liberty and the innocent peace of His children.

I take to myself, sir, the lesson I preach to others, and know well that I need to seek peace where I tell them to seek it. My own heart is suffering. It is through living to self that one suffers ; the dead do not feel suffering. If we were dead, and "our life hid with Christ in God," as the Apostle says,[1] we should not feel any of these mental troubles. We might have bodily sufferings, such as fever, gout, etc., and we might have certain spiritual sufferings —that is to say, such as visit the soul without any agency of its own ; but as to sufferings arising from anxiety, in which resistance doubles the weight of the cross laid on us by God, all such only arise because we live to ourselves.

A cross wholly inflicted by God, and fully accepted without any unrestful hesitation, is full of peace as well as of pain. On the contrary, a cross not fully and simply accepted, but even slightly resisted by the love of self, is doubled : it is still more a cross,

[1] Col. iii. 3.

thanks to that futile resistance, than through the pain it necessarily entails. Suffering and peace are marvellously blended in purgatory. Nothing suffered there but comes from the Hand of God, and there is no resistance of will mingled with that pain. Happy they who can bear suffering in this peaceful acquiescence! Nothing so lightens and alleviates pain.

But for the most part we bargain with God: we always want to fix a limit and see the end. The same hidden root of obstinate self-love which makes us need crosses makes us repulse them and hinder their work. And so it has to begin again perpetually; we suffer, yet do not allow the work that suffering has to do to be achieved. I pray our Lord that none of us may fall into that torpid state in which our crosses do us no good. S. Paul says that "God loveth a cheerful giver."[1] How much more must He love those who give themselves up cheerfully to His Will, ready to bear all His dealings, however painful!

## XL.

### The Blessing of Suffering.

I CANNOT but marvel at the virtue of the cross: we are worth nothing save through it. It makes me shudder convulsively as soon as I feel it, and all that I have said about its healing gifts vanishes before the agony inflicted on my heart. But so soon as I recover my breath I open my eyes once more, I see

[1] 2 Cor. ix. 7.

the blessing, and am ashamed that I was so speedily overthrown. The experience of this feebleness is a searching lesson.

Whatever state your invalid may be in, and whatever end God may send to her malady, she is happy to be thus docile in the Lord's Hand. If she dies, she will die unto the Lord ; if she lives, she will live to Him. "To suffer or to die" was S. Teresa's prayer.

There is nothing higher than the cross, save the perfect reign of God ; and even so suffering lovingly borne is the beginning of that reign, with which we must rest content while He delays the full consummation. You, like me, stand in need of crosses, and the faithful Giver of all gifts has ordered wisely for us. His Holy Name be blessed for ever, because He chastens us for our correction !

I have nothing more to say concerning yourself. I can see nothing to add to that which God is showing you, and which it is important to follow unremittingly. Die to self more and more. Such death is far deeper when laid on us by another. Accept the dependence in which God places you ; it is good for you, and will tend to conquer your self-esteem and to make you lowly—you whose tendency is to lead others. I feel for all your crosses. I seem to be closely united to all who suffer in our Lord. Suffering is only sent to lead us on. When God purposes to accomplish a great work in a short time, He sends many crosses, and His blows fall heavily ; but oh, how full of love they are, even when they seem to crush us pitilessly ! The cross is a holy relic to be kept close, and love

without the cross would be a frenzy, and become illusion; but the cross brings down all lofty ideas, all beautiful imaginations, all consoling fervours. One becomes very lowly under suffering, especially when it is sharp and prolonged, and one winces sorely under it. Suffering is a merciful purgatory in this world; but who bears it like the souls God is purifying in the next? Who among us bears it like them—motionless beneath God's Hand, seeking no relief, without impatience, without attempt to shake it off; with a calm, ever-increasing love, with a pure joy amid every pang, and with a lowliness and simplicity which keeps them from imagining that in so suffering they are offering up anything to God? Let us strive to found some such an earthly purgatory even as men found hospitals.

## XLI.

### To One living in Solitude.

I WILL never fail any of those whom God has committed to me, so do not fear lest I give you up. Moreover, God would very readily do Himself that which He ceased to do through a wretched instrument. "Fear not, man of little faith." Abide in all your wonted habits; give full confidence to N . . . , who knows you thoroughly, and can help you in all your troubles. No convent would suit you; all would be a restraint, and put you into perilous temptation. Restraint would harass you. Remain free in your solitude, and occupy yourself in all simplicity with God. Every day is a festival

for those who try to live unfettered by any will save His. Never prescribe any limit to Him. Never hinder any of His workings. Why should you hesitate to open when the Bridegroom knocks at the door of your heart? . . .

There is an exceeding difference between suffering and trouble of mind (*la peine et le trouble*). Simple suffering is a purgatory; but a troubled mind is as hell. Suffering without unfaithfulness is calm and peaceful, by reason of the entire purpose of the soul to accept the pain sent by God. But trouble and anxiety are as a revolt against God, and a division of the will which seems to tear the very soul to pieces. Oh, how purifying sorrow alone is!—how sweet, in spite of all the pain it brings! Those who accept what they suffer have no suffering of the will, and thus they are in peace. Blessed seed of Paradise sown in purgatory! But if we resist God, under whatever plausible pretexts, we move Him to resist us. Forsaking the grace He has given, you throw aside peace; and the knowledge of this is like the pillar of fire by night and of cloud by day which led the Israelites in the wilderness. Live by faith, and die to all worldly wisdom.

## XLII.

### The Importance of not requiring too much of Others.

N . . . is brave and a warm friend, and these two characteristics carry her beyond her strength; she fancies herself able to do more than she is really

able. What you say touches her, but she is not yet thoroughly capable of the sacrifices you require of her. Jesus Christ, Who knew His disciples better than they knew themselves, said, "I have many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now."[1] And He told them, "Ye shall all be offended because of Me this night." S. Peter maintained that it would not be true of him: "Though all shall be offended, yet will not I. . . . If I should die with Thee, I will not deny Thee in any wise."[2] Our Lord persisted, foretelling that Peter would deny Him three times before the cock crowed; and soon after a maid-servant's question caused him to deny his Master with an oath. This is what comes of relying on one's self and one's own strength. Let N . . . go on reading, feeling, praying, feeding her soul. You must be patient, and let souls take in for long before you ask them to give out anything. They must have been nourished inwardly by prayer, and have attained some degree of love, before you can hope to see them bring forth visible fruits of good works. How does a mother deal with her babe? She suckles and carries him. If she tried to make him walk at first, he would only fall; but when he has gained strength through her milk, you see him beginning to go of his own accord. And so in the spiritual life we must wait and carry the sucking babes. When God makes His drawing sufficiently felt to point out a separation from the world, it will be time enough to help the person in question to come to this trying decision.

[1] John xvi. 12. [2] Mark xiv. 27-31.

## XLIII.

### On sensible Fervour.

BE at rest, M . . . Sensible fervour in no wise depends upon yourself: the only thing so depending is your will. Give that to God without reserve. The point is not to feel an attraction for holiness, but to will whatever God wills. Acknowledge your faults humbly, seek detachment, give yourself up, try to love God more than yourself, and His Glory more than life; at all events, desire to attain such love, and ask it of Him. He will love you, and will fill your heart with His Peace.

## XLIV.

### To the same Person in Sickness.

WE turn all evil into good by bearing it patiently for the love of God; and, on the contrary, we turn all good into evil when we cleave to it in self-love. All real good lies in detachment and self-abandonment to God. Now is the time of trial. Now you must lie in God's Hand in unreserved confidence and trust. What would I not give to see you speedily cured of your malady, and still more of the love of the world! Self-love is a hundred-fold more poisonous than smallpox: its poison lurks within. I pray heartily for you. . . .

Do not be anxious, you are in God's Hands. Live as though you expected to die each day; then you will always be ready, for true preparation

consists in detachment from the world and cleaving to God. While you are so ailing, do not distress yourself about being regular in your meditation. The effort might be harmful to you in your weak state. While that lasts, it is enough if you recall the Presence of God quietly whenever you find that you have forgotten it. Simple, familiar intercourse with God, telling Him all that troubles you, and asking His comfort, will not exhaust you, but will strengthen your heart."

## XLV.

### Conscious Weakness a Source of Humility.

I AM experiencing a shameful weariness of the cross. I seem to have no strength left for suffering, or power to breathe. I shudder at the cross, and not less at my own cowardice, and between the two I am a very burden to myself. I tremble continually with the dread of some fresh cause of suffering. Such a life is not living; but what does it matter? Our life ought to be merely a slow death. We have only to give ourselves up to the All-Powerful Will Which is crucifying us by degrees. My heart aches just now at what you tell me, and your suffering increases mine; but I detect an amount of selfishness and levity in myself of which I am ashamed. I am overwhelmed by the smallest contrariety, and the most trivial encouragement exalts me unduly. Nothing is so humbling as to discover how tender one is over one's self, how hard towards others, how cowardly at the shadow of a cross, how frivolously

ready to rebound at the least gleam of flattery. But it is well; God opens a very wonderful book for our instruction when He sets us reading our own hearts.

## XLVI.

### To the Same.

THIS depression which is wearing you distresses me; I dread it for you more than any active suffering. I know by experience what it is to feel one's heart withered, and disgusted with all that might bring comfort. Even yet I sometimes feel this sort of general revulsion; and I am quite sure that, if it were continual, I should not long be able to fight against it. I have just been on a mission in Tournai. Everything went off well, and there was some food for self-satisfaction; but, after all, the good one does is but a small matter. If one were not upheld by the spirit of faith to work on without seeing the fruit of one's labour, one would be disheartened, so little does one accomplish, either in winning others or in amending one's self. Oh, what a difference there is between disgust and weariness with one's self and real amendment! I am a large diocese to myself, more overwhelming than the external one, and which I am unable to reform! But one must bear with one's self without flattery, in like manner as with one's neighbours.

## XLVII.

### To One suffering from Depression.

I THINK I understand what is troubling you. You are in such a dry, barren state that you can find no solace, and lack all confident assurance. But your conduct is straightforward, and free from all that tends to illusion. I even fancy that you are more regular, without being less unconstrained. I can see that you are more moderate, less decided, more kindly, less keen to the faults of others, more patient, more diligent in your duties. Though you may fancy that all this is natural, nevertheless it is not at all your natural tendency, but quite the reverse. We need not be surprised that the workings of grace hide themselves by mingling with those of nature. Moreover, one is always committing faults of natural impulse, especially persons of a quick temper, and the inner consciousness makes one believe that life is full of such natural impulses to which one yields. Yet all the while one is working to conquer them, and the work is not less real because it is very imperceptible. And on the other hand, a perception of one's faults keeps up mistrust of self and humility. Do not, then, be down-hearted; and even if God gives you but little comfort, do not grow weary of waiting on Him. The world is not suitable to you. Most society would not be congenial, even if it was not dangerous; but I should like you to have some innocent companionship to amuse and refresh your mind. As for myself, I am dry and languid, life has no pleasure; but one must

be always going on, and take daily what it pleases God to send. If I dared, I would say that I wish for Him only and solely.

## XLVIII.

### To One given to criticise Others.

I MUST confess that I am delighted to see you overwhelmed by your faults and your powerlessness to conquer them. Such despair when the natural man is reduced to expect nothing from self and to hope only in God, is exactly what He wants. He will amend us when we give up the hope of amending ourselves. It is true that your natural character is quick and sharp, with a morbid tendency too much alive to the faults of others, and prone to retain impressions; but God will not judge you for your natural temperament, which you did not choose, and cannot lay aside at will. It will indeed turn to your sanctification if you bear it as a cross. What God does require of you is that you should really do what His Grace puts before you. You have to be lowly within, as you cannot be meek externally; you have to drop your natural *hauteur* directly that you become conscious of it; you have to make up by meekness for the harm you may have done in a burst of pride; you have to practise lowliness steadily and perseveringly when opportunity arises; you have to lay aside your own views in all sincerity.

It is not to be wondered at that the high esteem in which your opinion has been held by so many

for years past should have insensibly fostered self-reliance and a pride of which you are unconscious. I am much more afraid of this for you than of any outbreaks of temper. Your temper will only lead to fits of rudeness; it will show you your pride, which perhaps you would never perceive without these outbreaks. But the real source of evil is solely the secret pride which has so long been nurtured under false pretences. Submit them to be humbled now by your own failings, just as formerly attention to the faults of others made you proud. Accustom yourself to see people slight your opinion, and try yourself not to criticise them. At any rate, if you find any fault, let it be in all simplicity; not with a view to judge and admonish, but only as a suggestion, and ready to be criticised yourself as well as to criticise. In a word, your great aim must be to put yourself on a level with the humblest and most faulty; lead them to be free and open with you, and if you have anything to impart to them, do so less as correcting than as comforting and strengthening them.

## XLIX.

### To the Same.

It seems to me that you need greater liberality as to the faults of others. I grant that you cannot help seeing them when they are forced upon you, or avoid your inevitable conclusions as to the principles on which some seem to act. Neither can you avert a certain annoyance which such

things cause. Suffice it if you try to bear with obvious faults, avoid judging such as are doubtful, and resist the dislike which estranges you from people.

Perfection finds it easy to bear with the imperfections of others, and to be all things to all men. One ought to learn to put up with the most obvious faults in worthy souls, and to leave them alone till God gives the sign for a gradual weeding; else one is likely to tear up the good grain with the weeds. God often leaves certain infirmities besetting the most advanced souls, such as seem quite out of character with their excellence; just as in reclaimed ground men leave tokens to show how extensive the work of clearance has been. God leaves such tokens to show whence He has brought them.

All such must labour in their own measure at self-amendment, and you must labour to endure their imperfections. Your own experience will teach you that correction is a bitter thing; and as you know this, give heed to soften it to others. You have not naturally so much an ardent zeal to correct others as a great fastidiousness which shuts your heart to them.

I intreat you more than ever not to spare any of my faults. Even should you think you detect such as do not really exist, it will not be a great misfortune. If your admonitions wound me, it will show that you have touched a tender place, and so you will do me service in exercising my humility, and accustoming me to bear reproof. I need humiliation more than most men, by reason of my naturally proud character, and because God requires

a more absolute death to all pride of me. I greatly need this honesty, and I trust that so far from disuniting us, it will draw us closer together.

## L.

### How to deal wisely with the Faults of Others.

. . . IMPERFECT as we ourselves are, we only know ourselves partly; and the same self-love which causes our failings hides them very subtly, both from others and from ourselves. Self-love cannot abide to see itself, the sight would overwhelm it with shame and vexation; and if it catches an accidental glimpse, it seeks some false light which may soften and condone what is so hideous. And thus we always keep up some illusion so long as we retain any self-love. To see ourselves perfectly, self-love must be rooted up, and the love of God reign solely in us, and then the same light which shows our faults would remove them. Till then we only half know ourselves, because we are only half given to God, cleaving to self a great deal more than we think, or dare to own to ourselves. When we "receive all truth," we shall see clearly; and loving ourselves only with the love of charity, we shall see ourselves as we see our neighbour, without self-interest, and without flattery. Meanwhile God spares our weakness, only showing us our true hideousness in proportion to the courage He gives us to bear the sight. He shows us first one bit, and then another, as He gradually leads us on to amendment. Without this

merciful preparation of light and strength in due proportion, the sight of our frailty would only tend to despair.

Those to whom spiritual guidance is intrusted should only lay bare men's faults as God prepares the heart to see them. One must learn to watch a failing patiently, and take no external measure until God begins to make it felt by the inward conscience. Nay, more: one must imitate God's Own way of dealing with the soul, softening His rebuke, so that the person rebuked feels as if it was rather self-reproach, and a sense of wounded love, than God rebuking. All other methods of guidance, reproving impatiently, or because one is vexed at infirmities, savour of earthly judgments, not the correction of grace. It is imperfection rebuking the imperfect: it is a subtle, clinging self-love, which cannot see anything to forgive in the self-love of others. The greater our own self-love, the more severe critics we shall be. Nothing is so offensive to a haughty, sensitive self-conceit as the self-conceit of others. But, on the contrary, the love of God is full of consideration, forbearance, condescension, and tenderness. It adapts itself, waits, and never moves more than one step at a time. The less self-love we have, the more we know how to adapt ourselves to curing our neighbours' failings of that kind; we learn better never to lance without putting plenty of healing ointment to the wound, never to purge the patient without feeding him up, never to risk an operation save when nature indicates its safety. One learns to wait years before giving a salutary warning; to wait till Providence prepares suitable

external circumstances, and grace opens the heart. If you persist in gathering fruit before it is ripe, you simply waste your labour.

You say rightly that your changeful moods escape you, and that you know not what to say of yourself. As most of our moods are passing and complicated, our explanations are apt to become untrue before we have finished making them; something quite different supervenes, and that in its turn seems unreal. So it is best to be content to say that about one's self which seems to be true at the moment one is opening one's heart. It is not necessary to tell everything methodically: suffice it to keep back nothing intentionally, and to soften nothing with the flattering touches of self-conceit. God supplies what is lacking to an upright heart according to its needs; and those [spiritual guides] who are enlightened by grace easily perceive what people do not know how to tell when the penitent is honest, simple, and unreserved.

As to our imperfect friends, they can only know us imperfectly. They often judge only from the external failings which make themselves felt in society, and which jar upon their own self-conceit. Self-conceit is a very sharp, harsh, unforgiving critic; and the same self-conceit which softens their view of their own faults makes them magnify ours. Their point of view being wholly different from ours, they see that which we do not perceive in ourselves, and overlook much that we see. They are quick to discern many things which wound their sensitive, jealous self-love, and which ours equally conceals; but they do not see those secret faults which sully

our virtues more, though they only offend God. And so their maturest judgment is very superficial. My conclusion is that it is best to hearken to God in a profound inward silence, and in all simplicity to say for or against one's self whatever His Light discovers to one at the moment one is seeking to open one's heart. . . .

## LI.

### The Trials of Self-renunciation.

I LIKE you best in pain and sorrow. I perceive honesty and lowliness in your letters, and I thank God gratefully for it. We must love what God loves, and I doubt not but that He loves us best when He humbles us. Painful though the operation may be, be sure that it is useful and necessary: the surgeon hurts in proportion as he cuts to the quick, and the patient feels nothing while it is mortified flesh that is probed. If you were really dead to the things in question, you would not feel pain when they are cut off. You must seek absolute detachment if you would be at peace and die to self. Do not be satisfied with making some effort, or with a humility which consists of jerks. Give yourself up to God unreservedly, and accept His dealings to the fullest extent. Be courageous, but not with a mere earthly courage: do not lose the mighty fruits of this cross. Submit yourself for correction, not merely to N . . . , but even to the most insignificant who may take upon themselves to admonish you in season and out of season. If

this is harmful to those who vent an indiscreet criticism upon you, at all events it is most profitable to you, who accept it in the spirit of self-abnegation. As to your faults, bear them patiently, as you would bear those of others, without over-indulgence or false excuses. You must not cherish them, because they are displeasing to God ; but you must realise your own helplessness to conquer them, and profit by the humiliation in your own sight to attain mistrust of self. Nothing can be done till you acquire this absolute mistrust of the natural man. But we must never despair of God's Goodness to us, and mistrust only ourselves. The more we mistrust self and trust in God only for the correction of our faults, the further that work will advance. But then, too, we must combine persevering efforts on our own part with trust in Him. Grace only works effectually in us in proportion to our unremitting correspondence to it. We must watch, do violence to self, shun self-delusion, accept the most humiliating counsels meekly, and measure our own faithfulness to God by our daily sacrifices and attempts at self-renunciation.

## LII.

### Patience in contemplating One's own Faults.

THERE never was a time when all hearts were more open to you than now ; but God permits you to be unable to see it—in fact, to imagine the precise reverse. All your sensitiveness and your groundless imaginations will turn to good, provided

that you do not give any voluntary consent to them. Even your heart is gnawed by a cruel jealousy: you will only be like the souls in purgatory, who, as you know, suffer keenly, yet with perfect peace. Suffering which does not deprive us of a peaceful will, and which is lovingly accepted, may be very keen, but it carries a powerful consolation with it. In such a state we suffer severely; but we are content to suffer, and would not lessen our suffering. If we could question the souls in purgatory as to their condition, they would reply, We suffer an exceeding pain, but nothing so takes away the sting of pain as full submission, and we do not seek to hasten our deliverance by one hour. They burn with a jealous and avenging fire. You burn with the fires of a jealous self-love, which God would divert into an entire sacrifice to pure love. Submit to Him unreservedly. Listen no more to your self-promptings—you will but prolong your purgatory—and remember that resistance to the Spirit of God will turn that purgatory into hell.

## LIII.

### Self-love contrasted with the Love of God.

I INTREAT you not to give ear to self. Self-love whispers into one ear, and the love of God into the other. Self-love is impetuous, restless, audacious, misleading; the love of God is simple, calm, laconic. It speaks with a gentle, tender voice. The moment one listens to the cries of self-love, one is unable to perceive the quiet, modest whisper of holy love.

Each speaks of its own chief object. Self-love speaks of nought save that "I," which, according to it, is never sufficiently considered. It seeks nothing but friendship, esteem, consideration, and is driven to despair by whatever does not flatter it. The love of God, on the contrary, would have this "me" forgotten, absolutely set aside, God being all: it would have that idol of worldly men trodden under foot, smashed, so that God Himself might become the "Me" of His loving servants, who should be as full of Him as worldly people are of "me." Strive to silence that chattering, complaining, idle self-love, and listen in the silence of your heart to that higher love, which only speaks when you take counsel with it. Do not fail to tell your troubles honestly to such persons as are able to comfort you.

## LIV.

### Hearkening to God only.

THOUGH you do not write to me, I cannot forbear writing, and urging you to give me tidings of yourself. Are you at peace in your solitude? Are you at peace with yourself? One is never less alone than when with one's self only. One can always leave others at certain hours, and find means of retirement; but directly one is given up to self, there is no season or interval sure. Self-love clamours day and night; the more solitary, the livelier and more importunate it is. I pray God to supplant it, and Himself to fill all the needs of your heart. Happy the soul which is hushed by listening to Him only!

What comfortable truths He whispers when room is made for Him! Just as we can tell God everything without any formal utterance, so He says all to us without connected speech. Man's heart never speaks so perfectly as when he lays it bare without reserve to God. He who opens it simply to the Divine Eye, giving himself up to the Will of his Beloved, says everything without one uttered word; and so likewise God says all without a word when He shows forth His Truth and Love. Where love is, there is all. Give yourself up to Infinite Love, and you will hear all and understand all.

## LV.

### Total Self-renunciation.

N . . . will tell you how much I think of you, and how glad I am to hear that you are at rest. Oh, what a mighty sacrifice simplicity is! It is the very martyrdom of self-love. Not to give ear to self-love is real abnegation; it is easier to bear the sharpest torments. Ten years of bodily austerities are as nothing in comparison with such a cutting off of the jealousies and sensitiveness of a restless personal self-love. Such abnegation would be the greatest of props if it were clearly perceived. But then it would cease to be self-abnegation; it would become the richest and most flattering of possessions. So that this self-abandonment must hide us from ourselves and be itself concealed, and then it will really give us all which it hides from our self-love. The heart's sole treasure is detachment.

Whoever is detached from all things—self included—will find more than all in God. The love of God grows rich in all that which an avaricious self-love loses. Do you live and die daily on Job's dunghill. Jesus Christ has made us rich, as S. Paul tells us, through His poverty.[1] We seek after cloth of gold, but all we want is the nakedness of the Cross, where Christ's garments were rent asunder and seized by those who crucified Him. It is easy for me to say all this,—I who am always seeking rest and comfort, I who shrink from pain and suffering, I who cry out directly that God touches the quick,—but nevertheless it is the truth which condemns me, and a condemnation which I endorse with my whole heart, if I do not deceive myself. Do you the like.

## LVI.

### Absolute Trust in God.

I DO enter into your troubles; would that I could something more! You must imitate Abraham's faith, and go on, not knowing whither. We only lose our way when we choose our own aim. Whoever seeks God's Will only finds it everywhere whithersoever God's Providence leads him, and so he never goes astray. Real trust, having no selfish path and no aim at self-pleasing, is sure to go straight on as God pleases. The straight way lies in renouncing self, so that God may be all, and we ourselves nothing. I hope that He Who feeds the birds of the air will take care of you. Happy he

[1] 2 Cor. viii. 9.

who like Jesus Christ has not where to lay his head! Surely they who have accepted interior poverty need not fear that which is exterior! Be faithful to God, and He will be faithful to His Promises. Give honour to religion, which is so much despised, and it will be returned with usury. Show the world a courtier who lives a life of simple faith.

Keep up a wholesome dread of your eager liveliness, your taste for the world, your secret ambition, which slips in unperceived. Do not let yourself be run away with amid political or social intercourse, which dissipates your mind, and unfits you for prayer and recollection. Talk but little, be brief, economise your time, work methodically and steadily, let deeds have the preference over fine words.

I repeat it, the future is not in your hands; it may never be yours. Be content to think of the present; eat your daily bread. "To-morrow will care for the things of itself; sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof." Storing up manna for two days is tempting God; the manna putrifies. You cannot to-day have to-morrow's grace; that will only come with to-morrow's need. The present moment is a brief eternity to us.

## LVII.

### The Same.

No one can be more keenly alive to all that has happened to you than I am. Bear your cross as a treasure; it is thereby that we become worthy of God, and conformed to His Dear Son. Crosses

are part of our daily bread; God regulates their proportions according to our real needs, which He knows, though we do not. Let us leave it all to Him. Do you let yourself be the child of Providence, and let your relations and friends talk. Do not seek to penetrate the future. The manna grew corrupt when, out of over-caution, it was stored up for more than a day. Do not ask, What are we to do to-morrow? "To-morrow will take thought for the things of itself." Confine yourself to the needs of to-day; God will each day give you the requisite help for those. "They who seek the Lord shall want no manner of thing that is good."[1] Providence would work miracles for us, but we hinder God's miracles by trying to forestall them. In our restless activity we erect ourselves into a providence as inefficient as that of God would be effectual.

As to N . . . , he cares for religion, and has good principles, but he needs strengthening and sustaining. He must be helped without constraining him. You know his impetuous mind and his long-formed habits; you must pass over many things in him which I should not pass over in you. God knows better than we do what He has given to each man, and what to require of him. You must be considerate, forbearing, patient, hopeful, and rely upon the Ruler of hearts, Who is faithful to His Promises. Be faithful and submissive yourself. Profit by your weaknesses to acquire unlimited self-mistrust, and by a childlike pliability in receiving correction. Lowliness will be your strength even amid weakness.

[1] Ps. xxxiv. 10.

## LVIII.

### The Same.

I CANNOT doubt but that God is treating you as one of His friends; that is to say, by giving you crosses, trials, and humiliations. These ways and means which He uses to draw souls to Him do their work quicker and more effectually than men's own exertions, for they root up the very fibres of self-love, which we could scarcely even discover; but God, Who knows all our coverts, goes straight to the point, and touches the mainspring of evil.

If we were strong enough and faithful enough to trust ourselves entirely to God, following Him simply wheresoever He wills to lead us, we should not need any mighty efforts in seeking after perfection; but because we are so feeble in faith, always wanting to see where we are going, without trusting in God, we lengthen our road and hinder our spiritual progress. Give yourself up as wholly as you can to God, and that to your last breath, and He will not forsake you.

## LIX.

### Watchfulness over Natural Temperament.

FOLLOW the path of mortification in which our Lord has led you, and strive to conquer the natural impetuosity which acts upon whatever you do. Be assured that all that is done of ourselves, by which I mean through natural temperament, is useless to

our progress in the things of God, because there is nothing supernatural in it; and because His Divine Majesty demands a perpetual reversion to our final cause from the souls He draws to Him, and when we act from natural inclination and predisposition, we stop short in ourselves, God having no share.

You see there the importance of controlling the impetuosity of your temper and passions, and that it is a very small thing to perceive and search the hidden things of the spiritual life if you neglect the necessary means of attaining your end, a true and real union with God. This does not require any effort of mind or brain, but simply an honest intention in the occasions that arise.

## LX.

### To One in Perplexity.

SOLITUDE is useful to you up to a certain point; it suits you better than the restraint of a Community rule, but you may easily be deluded by your taste for retirement. Be content only to see those with whom you have either inward bonds of grace or external providential bonds; and even then do not make a positive rule only to see such as these, but follow the dictates of your heart without overmuch argument as to seeing or not seeing those whom you would naturally see. Above all, do not shun those who are likely to forward your vocation.

I would have you avoid all active efforts with respect to the person you allude to. Make no rule either to avoid or to seek her; only try to be ready

to be useful and speak the truth to her whenever she may seek you. Never repulse her; let her always find your heart open to her. When she seems estranged, write to her as the occasion may require in all simplicity, recalling her to a straightforward service of God. Warn her of the snares to be feared, but do not be anxious, or expect to correct earthly failings by earthly activity.

You doubt, and you cannot bear up under doubt. I am not surprised, doubt is torture; but do not argue, and you will cease to doubt. The shadows of a simple faith are very different from doubt; its troubles bring their own consolation and fruits. After they have reduced a man, they restore him, and leave him in full peace. Doubt is the trouble of a soul left to itself, which wants to see what God hides from it, and out of self-love seeks impossible securities. What have you sacrificed to God save your own judgment and self-interest? Would you lose sight of that which has been your aim from your very first step, namely, to abandon yourself to God? Would you make shipwreck when just in port, recall your gift, and require God to subject Himself to your rules, whereas He requires, and you have promised, to walk Abraham-like in the deepest darkness of faith? And what merit would there be in your course, if you had miracles and revelations to make you sure of your path? Miracles and revelations would soon lose their force, and you would fall back into your doubts. You are giving way to temptation. Do not hearken to yourself; your real convictions, if you will follow them simply, will put to flight all these phantoms.

There is a wide difference between that which your mind strings together in its perplexity and that which your true convictions really maintain. The last is of God, the other is all self-will. On whose account are you troubled—your own, or God's? If it were solely for God, you would see things simply, quietly, clearly, and would loosen your hold on all created things. But, on the contrary, you are troubled for your own sake, and so it is all anxiety, restlessness, dryness of heart, eagerness to seek earthly stays, and reluctance to die to self.

What can I say to you? You want to be clothed upon, and I can only wish to see you stripped. You want sureties, and God in His jealousy refuses them. You want to live, whereas the thing is to die consciously and willingly. You ask me for means; there are none,—the work of death to self is achieved by letting go of them all. What is there left to do for a man on the rack? Should we give him food or medicine, or the cordials for which he intreats? No, that would be to prolong his sufferings by a cruel kindness, eluding the judge's sentence. What then? Nothing save to be passive, and let him die as soon as possible.

## LXI.

### To One in Mental Distress.

No one can feel more than I do for your present state. Your troubles are involuntary, and will be turned into merits as soon as you can bear them with patience and humility. But you will turn these

acceptable sufferings into a dangerous faithlessness if you give way overmuch to them. It matters nothing that we feel the most evil passions, so long as the will gives no consent; so do not be disturbed God allows your imagination to exaggerate things in order to try and humble you. Throw yourself into His searching views. Let yourself be bound to the cross He sets before you, but do not add any of your own invention. It is in the beginning of a temptation that one can stem its progress by simple faithfulness. What peace you might enjoy amid your most trying moments if you would accept them without any tenderness over yourself! Despairing self-love cries out. I am not surprised; it is all the better that it has cause to cry out. But do you go on your way without heeding it. Such simple faithfulness would at once do away with three-quarters of your trials. There would be no more anxiety, and it is that which makes them unbearable. Lie still in God's Bosom, and He will give you ease.

## LXII.

### The Same.

I HOPE that God will quiet your soul. I do not want to remove the keenly painful feelings, or even the involuntary reflections which torment you; I would only have you not add to them deliberately. You often give way to your own thoughts. I have noticed that after an interval you resume your reflections. Now this is the real source of your worst troubles. Moreover, you say that you cannot

help heeding your own reasoning, because it seems so plain. But beware, for all suspicious, indocile people say the same. You must silence yourself, not forcibly, but by a simple, quiet resolution to leave all to God, and to give yourself up to His Grace.

A mere nothing besets you for hours or days because you fan the flame, and so it spreads in your heart. Do not make to yourself more crosses than those which God's Own Hand lays upon you. You feel what He wills, attend to nothing else; all besides is mere temptation. Obey without consulting either your reason or your power. God will do all if you leave it to Him. I intreat you to listen to Him with a really silent heart. I repeat it: temptation, however humiliating it may seem, turns to good when borne patiently without consenting to it. The very humiliation is the profitable part; what we specially need is the very thing which horrifies our self-esteem. I am never alarmed at any wrong feelings which people confess simply, and do not cleave to with the will. Offer your trouble to Him Who only permits it in order that you may bring it to Him as a sacrifice. Seek that rest in Jesus Christ which you will never find in yourself.

## LXIII.

### Resolutions not to be made during Excitement.

THE vehemence of your trouble is like a torrent, which must be permitted to flow past. Nothing that is said reaches you, and you imagine yourself

perfectly certain of the most unreal things ; but this is a common effect of great trial. God permits you to be blind to what is before your very eyes in spite of all your cleverness, while you fancy that you distinctly see what does not exist. God will turn all this to His Own Glory, provided you leave all trustfully in His Hands. But nothing could be more inexcusable than to make resolutions pending a state of disturbance, the very existence of which involves an impossibility of doing so rightly.

When you have calmed down, strive in a recollected spirit to do whatever you believe most conformable to God's intentions for you. Resume your meditations gradually, as also a simple tone, and forgetfulness of self. Go to Communion. Hearken to God rather than to yourself, then do whatever your heart dictates ; I am not afraid that in such a mind you will take a wrong line. But to affect to trust yourself in the height of excitement, and while subject to a violent temptation from self-will, is wilful error. Ask any sensible confessor you please, and he will tell you that it is only allowable to make resolutions when you have regained quietude and recollection. He will tell you that it is wilful self-deceit not to mistrust yourself during a time when your natural disposition is so disturbed and irritated. You will answer that I want to hinder your change by stopping you from making it at the only time you are capable of doing so. God knows it is not so ; I have no desire to hinder or allow it, I only want to enable you not to fail towards God. And it is clear as daylight that you will fail if you act upon the movements of a self-love wounded to the

quick, and a vexation little short of despair. Do you want to act in order to satisfy your self-will, even if God would not have it so? God forbid! Wait, then, till you are in a condition to consult Him. To deserve to be enlightened by Him you must be prepared for all, and have nothing you would keep from sacrificing to Him.

## LXIV.

### To One who seemed to be resisting God.

YOUR letter is a real consolation to me, for I see that God is not weary of pursuing you in love, even when you make so many attempts to escape. What trouble you take to fly from Him! If you would but take as much to let Him do His Will! Why are you so afraid of death, that you put yourself to such torture in order to retain the mere particle of a painful existence? Let yourself be dealt with; you cling to the mere relics of self-will. You need only simplicity and forgetfulness of self. You want me to give you remedies in order to live, when all you have got to do is to die. Go to the other end of the world, and you will still find your fastidious, irritable, self-consuming mind, and you will still find God jealously and inexorably requiring its entire destruction. You carry these two jealousies about with you, and they tear you to pieces. Die, for the smallest spark of life is mere pain; death alone will take away sensitiveness. Give yourself up wholly into God's Hand.

## LXV.

### To a Gentleman.

I HAVE often thought since yesterday, sir, of what you told me, and I hope more and more that God will sustain you. Although you may not feel any great taste for religious exercises, you should nevertheless be as steady to them as your health will allow. A convalescent is without appetite, but notwithstanding he must eat in order to get strong.

It would be helpful if you could sometimes have some Christian conversation with those members of your family to whom you can open your heart; but act quite freely in this, according to your feelings. God is not leading you by means of keen sensibility, and I am glad of it, so long as you are stedfast in well-doing; for stedfastness without the support of inclination is far purer and less liable to danger than great sensitiveness of the imagination. Some daily reading and recollection will insensibly give you light and strength for all the sacrifices you owe to God. Love Him, and I will ask for no more; all else will come through love. Neither do I ask for an eager, emotional love; suffice it if your will is to love, and if, in spite of lingering inclinations to evil, your heart prefers God to the whole world, yourself included. You were the most ungrateful of men not to love God Who has so loved you, and Who is not weary of knocking at the door of your heart, that His Love may enter in. If you have not that love within you, at least ask it, wish for it, and await it confidently.

## LXVI.

### To One suffering from Isolation.

I HOPE, sir, that in this state of painful isolation you will find the best of consolations apart from all human help. God will make known to you what He alone can be when all else fails. The length of this trial will serve to strengthen you against yourself, and to render your self-abnegation unbounded. In giving one's self up to God while all is quiet and peaceful, one does not know what one means or promises, and however sincere, the renunciation is at best superficial. But when the cup which overflows with bitterness is offered us, nature shudders; we become "sorrowful unto death," even as our Lord in the Garden of Olives; we sweat blood and water, and cry out, "Let this cup pass from me!" Happy he who can conquer this revulsion and natural repugnance, and add, like the Son of God, "Nevertheless not my will, but Thine be done"!

Of a truth, sir, I should greatly regret were you to lose the least drop of the cup God gives you to drink. Now is the time to exercise your faith and love. How well God must love you, since He deals you such heavy blows! Whatever sacrifice He may require, never hesitate to give it.

## LXVII.

### To the Duc de Chevreuse. On Intellectual Dangers.

YOUR mind is too much absorbed by outward things, and yet more by reasoning, to be able to maintain a frequent thought of God. I am always very much afraid of your excessive tendency to rationalise ; it is an impediment to that recollection and silence in which God imparts Himself to us. We should be simple, humble, and honestly detached with men ; recollected, calm, and not argumentative with God. The people to whom you formerly gave most heed were unboundedly dry, rationalistic, critical, and opposed to the interior life. If you were now to listen to them ever so little, you would be entangled in endless arguments, and by a perilous curiosity which would draw you back from grace to the depths of your natural weakness. Long-formed habits are easily renewed, and the falling back into our original failings is so easy that we notice it less than most other changes. Be on your guard against this ; keep watch over the first beginnings, which lead to all the rest.

For the last four months I have had no leisure for study ; but I am very glad to dispense with it, and cleave to nought from which God's Providence detaches me. Perhaps this winter I may be able to return to my library ; but even then I shall only enter it on one foot, ready to depart at the first signal. One's mind has to fast as well as one's body. I have no desire to write, or speak, or to be

talked of, or to argue, or to persuade anybody. I live from day to day, dryly enough, and hampered by sundry external difficulties; but I stand in need of change, and take what recreation I can. They who foretell marvels, and are in terror of me, are mere dupes! Poor people, I have so little to do with them that I should be mad were I to put myself out in order to hurt them! I would gladly say, like Abraham to Lot, "Is not the whole land before us? If you will take the left hand, then I will go to the right."

Blessed are they who are truly set free! None save the Son of God can deliver us, but He does it only by breaking every bond. And how does He break these? By the sword, dividing husband and wife, father and son, brother and sister. Then the world counts for nothing, but so long as it holds us, liberty is a mere word, and we are like a bird whose feet are held by a string—it seems free, but it cannot fly beyond the length of its cord, and so it is a prisoner. You understand the parable? What I wish for you is better than anything you can fear to lose. Be faithful in what you know, so as to deserve further knowledge. Mistrust your intellect, which has so often deceived you. Mine has so deceived me that I cannot reckon on it. Be simple, and firm in your simplicity. "The fashion of this world passeth away,"[1] and we shall pass away with it if we conform to its vanities; but the truth of God abideth for ever, and we shall be stable as it if we hold stedfastly to it.

Once more, be on your guard against *savants* and

[1] 1 Cor. vii. 31.

rationalists. They will always be a snare to you, and will do you more harm than you will do them good. They hover about weighty questions, but never attain the knowledge of the truth. Their curiosity is as an insatiable spiritual avarice; they are like those conquerors who ravage the world without taking possession. Solomon speaks with profound experience of the vanity of their researches.

Those who study should treat it as a real calling of Providence, and work as men go to market for their necessary provisions day by day; and meantime all study should be carried on in a spirit of prayer. God is at once Truth and Love. We cannot really know the Truth unless we love it. They who love well will know well: not to love Love itself is not to know it. He who loves much, and abides humbly and lowly in his ignorance, is the beloved of Truth; he knows that which wise men are ignorant of, and do not even care to know. This is the learning I desire for you, a science revealed to babes and sucklings, and hidden from the prudent and wise.

## LXVIII.

### To the Same.

### On the Difficulties of a Busy Life.

I CAN see much more plainly what God is doing for you than what you are doing for Him. As a general matter, you wish to cleave to Him with your heart, but your practical results are not alto-

gether in conformity with your theories and wishes. Bear with me, if I say that you very often unconsciously follow your natural tendency to speculative research. It is a lifelong habit, which tells upon you insensibly and unintentionally at almost every turn. Your position still further increases this subtle temptation ; the whirl of business draws you on continually and rapidly. I have often noticed that you are always in a hurry to go from one occupation to another, while at the same time each particular thing carries you too far. This is because you give way overmuch to your tendency to dissect and preconise everything. You are not slow, but you are lengthy. You spend a great deal of time upon each thing ; not from slowness of action—on the contrary, your work is often hurried—but owing to the quantity of detail you take in. You want to say everything that has the smallest connection with what is in hand, you are always afraid of not saying enough ; and this makes every proceeding too long, and obliges you constantly to hurry from one thing to another without interval. If you could be briefer, each matter would find room, and drop into its place without hindrance ; but to attain brevity you must learn to retrench whatever is not essential, and to avoid a precision of detail which encumbers that which is really necessary with superfluities. In order to be sober in word you must be sober in thought ; you must not follow your natural impulse to convince others. You will only reach the source of evil by frequently withdrawing yourself into an interior silence. Such a silence of simple prayer would soon calm that

actively argumentative mind, and soon God's Spirit would cast out all your speculation and discursiveness. You would learn to look at each matter from a simple, clear point of view ; you would speak as you think ; you would say what has to be said in two words, instead of taking so many means to convince men. You would be less burthened, less excited, less distracted, freer, more easy, more methodical, though without effort, more decided, both on your own behalf and your neighbour's. Moreover, this silence, which would greatly tend to expedite external matters of business, would accustom you to do even your business in a spirit of prayer. Everything would be made easier to you ; but otherwise you will become more and more pressed, weary, and spent, and the business which overpowers the interior needs of the soul will likewise overpower the health of the body.

In God's Name cut these things short from morning to night, but deal with yourself in the same way as with others. Silence yourself inwardly ; return to frequent earnest prayer, but without effort, rather dropping all thought than struggling against those which arise, and seeking such as do not offer themselves. Such calm and leisure will forward your affairs in a way which eagerness and forced efforts will never do. Listen rather less to your own thoughts, so as to be able to listen more to God. I venture to promise, that if you are thus faithful to your own inward light on every occasion, you will soon feel relief in your work, be more able to satisfy your neighbours, and at the same time walk much more truly in your vocation.

It is not enough to care for good books, you must be a good living book yourself. Your inner mind should be the reality of these ideals. The saints had more difficulties and crosses than you, yet amid all these difficulties they preserved and fostered peace, simplicity, purity of life, and almost continual prayer. I beseech you not to give way to ill-timed scruples ; be afraid of self-will in altering your course, but do not be afraid of your course itself, which is simple and straightforward enough. I can easily believe that the multitude of your affairs distracts you and withers you up. The real remedy is to cut each thing short, and not give way to your tendency to detail, lest by degrees your inward grace should run dry. "Be renewed in the spirit of your mind."[1] Be like wise men who find that they are spending too much, and retrench vigorously for fear of ruin. Reserve seasons for interior refreshment, which will be the source of grace for all occasions ; and even in the press of external occupation strive to act quietly, and with a brevity which will be a constant self-discipline. Further, you should cultivate your taste for good books. Read these, unless you substitute meditation ; or indeed, you might do both, reading whenever you do not feel drawn to meditation, and giving up books for meditation when they lead you to it. Finally, you need intercourse with some one gifted with true interior grace—not necessarily any very advanced person, or in the position of a director. Perfectly simple intercourse with some one utterly free from rationalistic speculation will do if you

[1] Eph. iv. 23.

open your heart and expand it freely. Such an one would comfort you, strengthen you, show you to yourself, and tell you home truths. Such intercourse makes us less proud, dry, narrow; more pliable in God's Hand, more accessible to reproof. A truth told us is harder to bear than a hundred which we tell ourselves. We are apt to be less humiliated by the latter than self-satisfied at our own wisdom in discovering them. But the blow from another always makes itself felt. Of course you must be careful who you choose for such intercourse. Most men would bore you, shut you up, and close your heart to a real self-knowledge. I can only think of M . . . as suitable. He has his faults, he is not perfect; but nobody is. Do you expect God will send you an angel? Do not be repulsed by his failings; the Apostles were not free. S. Paul says that his "bodily presence was weak and his speech contemptible,"[1] yet his epistles were not the less to be heeded. There is always something to lower the mere man and exercise the faith of those around.

## LXIX.

### To the Same.

I PRAY our Lord that He alone may be all things to you. The deeper, more subtle and refined self is in a man, the harder it is to conquer. It escapes in subtleties, it excuses itself under plausible pretexts, it is all the more dangerous when it seems least so.

This is the secret history of an inquiring mind

[1] 2 Cor. x. 10.

given to reasoning, possessed by philosophic systems, and striving to rule all around by the same. We, on the contrary, should be possessed by a spirit altogether superior to our own: our philosophy needs to give place to evangelic simplicity. "Blessed are the poor in spirit." Whence I infer, Woe to the wealthy-minded, to the learned who heap up knowledge, to the self-satisfied philosopher, to the insatiable inquirer, who hoards his lights as a miser his treasure! These evil rich men are daily feasting on intellectual banquets, while Lazarus patiently suffers hunger. "I thank Thee, O Father . . . because Thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes."[1] The mind needs to fast as well as the body; it is subject to an intemperance of its own. Now fasting, which seems an exhausting process, strengthens an overloaded stomach; and in like manner an overladen mind needs to fast—it will be all the stronger, and digest better. The fast of silence, recollection, and prayer strengthens the soul; whereas overmuch external activity distracts it. "Sapere ad sobrietatem" is a deep truth. Jesus Christ, though He was for such a brief time on earth to teach men, did not fail to call His Apostles to leave their work for seasons of holy rest and calm.

Work steadily, then, but without letting yourself be distracted by a crowd of things which involve indecision and delay. Cut matters short, and be content rather to make mistakes in detail than to make the universal mistake of completing nothing

[1] Matt. xi. 25.

through aiming at too much. Do not let yourself be carried away by the stream of business, and always reserve some time for being alone with God.

As to mere indulgence of curiosity in reading, you cannot check it overmuch. Excess produces indigestion, and mere curiosity puffs up the heart. Men are filled with what is nought, for such empty knowledge does not promote the interior life, which consists wholly in the love of God.

## LXX.

### To the Same.

### Dangers of a Questioning Mind.

HE who would fain satisfy himself perpetually that he is guided by reason, not by temper or passion, will only lose his time, without ever coming to a satisfactory result; for he can never be certain that temper or passion in specious disguise are not moving him to do what he fancies himself doing from pure reason. It is God's Will to keep us in this obscurity even as to the natural order of things. How much more must we be content to forego evidence and certainty, when it is a question of the most delicate workings of grace, in the deep darkness of faith and supernatural things. This restless, obstinate search after an unattainable certainty is very evidently the work of nature, not of grace; you cannot be too much on your guard against it. It is a subtle inquiry which will take a hundred shapes. This craving for geometrical certainty is

rooted in you by all your natural inclinations, by lifelong and interesting studies, by habits become second nature, and by a plausible desire to watch and guard against illusion. But an evangelic vigilance should never go so far as to disturb the heart's peace, or to demand evidence as to the secret operations of grace which it pleases God to keep hidden beneath a veil.

To speak frankly and unreservedly, you perfectly know that you ought to dread your excessive tendency to reason, even about all the common matters of everyday life. You ought to dread it much more when it meddles with these workings which are above reason, and which God conceals. One thing is quite certain, namely, that the more faithful you are in mortifying your intellectual tastes, your inquisitive philosophic research, your undue wisdom, forced speculations, and efforts to convince other men, the more you will mortify your real natural frailties, and therein promote the life of grace in you.

Listen stedfastly to God, but do not voluntarily give ear to self on matters of intellectual taste. Your letters give me real pleasure, for they show a light concerning and opposed to yourself which only God's Grace working powerfully in a soul can give, when He finds it ready to cast aside whatever might hinder it from treading in His paths. I pray God that you may never look back, but that His Will may be yours in all things :—"Et erit omnia in omnibus."[1]

[1] 1 Cor. xv. 28: "That God may be all in all."

## LXXI.

### To the Same.

I AM delighted that you find what you want in the person mentioned. God supplies what He wills where He will. Naaman could not be healed by any of the waters of Syria; he was forced to wash in a river of Palestine. What matters it whence the light and strength come? The only important matter is the source, not the channel. That which most proves our faith, uproots our worldly wisdom, overthrows our self-conceit, humbles and simplifies us, is the most according to God's designs for us. Accept what He sends, and accept it as from the Spirit, "Which bloweth where it listeth." We know not "whence it cometh or whither it goeth;" but the point is not to seek to know what God hides, rather to be faithfully attentive to what He reveals.

If you can wean yourself from all that is mere idle curiosity and superfluous reasoning, you will gain a great deal of time for meditation and for business. The spirit of prayer will make you simple, concise, clear, moderate in thought and word, calm under difficulties. Self is active, verbose, vacillating, impulsive, manysided, for ever aiming at what is impossible, losing sight of the end for the sake of the means, wanting to convince, please, conciliate all. The spirit of grace calmly seeks nought save to be faithful, not fearing but that faithfulness will overcome all hindrances. This is the peace which the world can neither give nor take away, and which exceeds all human conception. How should

the world give it? The world can neither understand it, nor believe in it in those who enjoy it. Argument is a great waste of strength. The friends of reason, *savants* who do not pray, extinguish the interior life as the wind puts out a candle. After associating with them one feels one's heart withered, and one's equilibrium shaken. You should shun such men, they are infectious. Some among them appear to be recollected, but are not really so. It is easy to confound a certain fervour of imagination with recollection. These men are keen about certain externals, which they desire eagerly. This zeal disturbs them, for they are perpetually occupied with points on which they argue, subtly and exhaustively; but they are devoid of inward peace, and the silence amid which God's Voice is heard, and thus they are more contagious than others, because their deviations are more disguised. Investigate them, and you will find them restless, censorious, hot, engrossed with externals, hard and bitter, fastidious, full of self, impatient of contradiction; in a word, a sort of spiritual gadfly, disturbed by everything, and almost always a source of disturbance to others.

## LXXII.

### To the Same.
### The Claims of Business.

WHAT I most desire for you is recollection, and a tolerably frequent pause amid so much that must dissipate your mind. A state of continual mental activity, unless absolutely required by God, exhausts

and dries up the inner life. You remember how Jesus Christ was wont to take His disciples apart, and interrupt even their most urgent business. Sometimes He would leave the multitude which "came from afar" and waited for His ministry; He would withdraw from them, and say to His disciples, "Come ye apart."[1] Suffer me to say the like to you. It is not enough to act or to give; we must know how to receive, to imbibe, to yield ourselves calmly to the Divine impress. You are too much in the habit of mental exercise, and you have an unconscious inquisitiveness, a continual series of processes, weighing, measuring, for ever tracing back principles in their results. I would rather see you amused by some trifle which might occupy your imagination and senses, but would leave your deeper being room to commune with the secret Presence of God. Minds that are much given to application find as much difficulty in laying it aside as those who have none in applying themselves. Pray then starve, silence, rest your active mind. "Come ye apart." Business will prosper all the more; you will toil less, but God will help it more. If you persist in doing everything, you leave nothing for Him to do. "Be still, and know that I am God,"[2] that is the Lord's true Sabbath.

## LXXIII.

### Contentment.

I WISH you that peace and joy in the Holy Spirit

[1] Mark vi. 31. [2] Ps. xlvi. 10.

which may be found amid all the trials and temptations of life. This is the essential difference between Babylon and the City of God. The inhabitant of Babylon, however intoxicated with worldly prosperity, has an indefinable heart's craving, which cries, Not enough! I have not all I want; and yet more, I have that which I want not! But, on the contrary, the inhabitant of the Holy City bears in his heart a perpetual *Fiat* and *Amen*. He wills to bear all his troubles, and does not desire any of the good things which God withholds. Ask him for what he wishes, and he will tell you that he wishes precisely the thing that is. God's Will at the actual moment is that daily bread which is better than all else; he desires all that God appoints in and for him. This Will satisfies his heart, it is a never-failing manna. Thou "shalt honour Him," Isaiah says, "not doing thine own ways, nor finding thine own pleasure, nor speaking thine own words."[1] And so it is said of the New Jerusalem, "Vocaberis voluntas mea in ea."[2] It can bear no other name, we can form no other idea of it; of itself it can be nothing. Even as S. John was but a Voice heralding Jesus Christ, so Jerusalem is but "God's delight in her." It is not she that lives and wills; it is the Bridegroom living and willing in the bride. What is His Will for you? That you should have none; that you should leave all to Him and His Holy Spirit.

[1] Isa. lviii. 13.

[2] Isa. lxii. 4. In the English Version this is rendered, "Thou shalt be called Heph-zibah;" or, as a marginal note has it, "My delight is in her."

"He that searcheth the hearts knoweth what is the mind of the Spirit, because He maketh intercession for the saints."[1] Be you, then, after God's Own Heart, "a man that executeth His counsel."[2] Do not hinder Him by any effort of self-will, by any straining to shape things your way.

Many good people under fair pretexts do what S. Augustine accuses the Semi-Pelagians of—assume that natural merits come first, and grace follows the leading of nature: "Gratia pedissequa." We want God to will what we wish, so that in accepting His Will we may have our own way.[3] But His Will must prevent ours, and He must be all things in us.

## LXXIV.

### To a Nobleman on the Death of his Son.

I THINK continually of your sorrow. Nor do I forget the great loss you have experienced; but what God takes away is His Own, not ours, and who shall say, Why hast Thou done this? I know you are very far from saying so. You know that He owes us no reckoning; His good pleasure is the supreme reason. That which were an intolerable caprice in any creature, namely, to say, "Sit pro ratione voluntas" (My will for a reason), is simply true and just in the Creator.

[1] Rom. viii. 27. [2] Isa. xlvi. 11.

[3] Had Faber been reading this letter when he wrote the lines:—

"I wish to have no wishes left,
But to leave all to Thee;
And yet I wish that Thou shouldst will
Things that I wish should be"?

Moreover, amid the heaviest strokes from His fatherly Hand we can always trace a hidden mercy. He removes at the right moment some fragile souls which might have fallen away under worldly temptation. "Speedily was he taken away from among the wicked."[1] The speed was to forestall some fatal fall. Oh, how many marvels which we miss here we shall see plainly in the next world! Then we shall sing a psalm of joy and gratitude for the events over which we have wept here below. In our present blindness we see neither our true good nor true evil. If God were to indulge us, all were lost; but He saves us by breaking our bonds, and constraining us to cry aloud. The same blow which saves him we love, by removing him from out a world of wickedness, loosens our hold on it, and we are prepared, through the death of another, for our own. What can we crave in this vain and polluted world for us and ours? If it be true that our heart lives by faith and love, ought we to weep because God loves us better than we love ourselves? ought we to murmur because He withdraws those dear to us from temptation and sin? Does He deal hardly with us by shortening our day of sorrow, struggle, temptation, and frailty? What would we have? Prolonged peril, stronger temptation, wherein the very elect themselves might, were it possible, fail? We desire all that fosters our selfishness, in order that we may forget ourselves in our exile. God snatches the poison from us, and we cry like a babe from whom its mother has taken a glistening knife, with which it was fain to pierce itself!

[1] Ecclus. iv. 11, 14.

Your son had been successful in this evil world; such success is perilous, and for that reason his days were cut short out of Divine Mercy to him and his. We must worship God and be silent. Prayer is the only comfort; in that alone we are wholly with God. So soon as we are with Him by union of the heart and simple faith, we pray; and all other things, however holy, if they check that intercourse, become rather study than prayer. And none save the Comforter can soothe sorrow. Let us, then, abide silently before Him; He will comfort us, and we shall find all, and more than we have lost, in Him. This is a true and inexhaustible Consolation.

## LXXV.

### To the Duc de Chevreuse.
### Dangers of the World.

*May 28, 1687.*

I AM very glad, my dear lord, to hear that the excitement of the journey has left the Duchess much as before. There is always reason to fear lest great changes should somewhat upset one; but eventually, if one holds fast to Jesus Christ in prayer and the Sacraments, the disturbance only tends to stablish one. The tree of which David speaks, planted by the waterside, and rooted, as the Apostle says, in humility and charity, is not shaken by the winds which tear up ill-rooted plants. Nay, such a tree is rather strengthened in proportion to its seeming agitation; all occasions of vanity, dissipation,

ambition, jealousy, are opportunities for good to such souls. But I agree with you that at such seasons we need to watch ourselves carefully, and keep close to God. Were He to turn away ever so little in punishment of our carelessness or faithlessness, we should soon be like David amid his Court. This monarch, who was a man after God's Own Heart, fancied himself unchangeably established in all good: "I said in my prosperity, I shall never be removed; but Thou didst turn Thy Face from me, and I was troubled."[1]

We have naturally such a fatal tendency to earthly things, and are urged so vehemently downwards by all around us, that if the Strength of Israel ceases for one moment to uphold us, our fall is inevitable. Our "way is dark and slippery," and the evil spirit urges us to our fall.[2] What can uphold us on the brink of a precipice towards which we voluntarily gravitate? Thy Grace alone, O God! Thee only, O Jesus, Who hast overcome the world, within us and without us, by offering attractions infinitely greater than those which seduce us. But, my dear Duke, this grace is only given in the ordinary channels—through prayer and the Sacraments. A pauper whose needs are continual, and who has neither skill nor strength to help himself, has no resource save continual begging of those who are able to satisfy his wants. Can we wonder, then, that our Lord and His Apostles bid us pray without ceasing? Even without any such precept our weakness would surely suggest it. But unhappily we do not realise our wants, urgent and

[1] Ps. xxx. 6, 7. [2] Ps. xxxv. 6

weighty as they are. The slightest failure in bodily strength is promptly felt and heeded; the least weakness in head or heart warns us to call in the physician and his remedies; but too often our spiritual strength becomes altogether exhausted before we realise that we are ailing. We attribute that which is often the result and sign of a besetting sin and a corrupt heart to some trifling impulse, some unimportant negligence, some passing weakness. We love the world and the things thereof with all our heart, and fancy that our aims are merely temporary, and do not affect our heart.

Who, my dear lord, can discriminate between the passing impression which the world makes on a soul exposed to its influences and the lasting hold which it acquires? Who can discern whether he is really "made subject to vanity, not willingly," as Holy Scripture says,[1] or voluntarily and complacently? What is to be done in so grievous an uncertainty? We can but humble ourselves, mourn, and pray continually. "O turn away mine eyes, lest they behold vanity; and quicken Thou me in Thy way."[2] It is an admirable prayer for one whose lot, like David's, is cast amid the world's attractions. O my God, Sovereign Truth, and above all things to be loved, turn away mine eyes from the vanity which meets them on every side; and inasmuch as their natural levity drags them incessantly towards the glittering objects which surround them, fix them, my God, on Thyself, making Thyself felt as only mighty things can be, arresting all my attention. But, Lord, it is not enough that Thou turn away

[1] Rom. viii. 20. [2] Ps. cxix. 37

mine eyes from vanity; I should soon return eagerly to the wretched but glittering baubles Thou hast hidden from me. Therefore lead me into the paths of holiness, where vanity does not interfere with those who love Thee: "Quicken Thou me in Thy way;" draw me into the path where, turn which way I will, I may find nought save truth and love. Fill continually both mind and imagination with thoughts and visions tending to Thee; steep my heart with the perfume of Thy heavenly sweetness; consecrate my body by the indwelling of Thy Spirit and the participation of Thy Body, so that heart and flesh may rejoice in the Living God. Grant, Lord, that having become Thy child—bone of Thy bone, flesh of Thy flesh, in Baptism, in Confirmation, and in the Holy Eucharist—I may live and move in Thee only. And if it be not according to Thy Providence, or for my good, that I be exempt from all temptation, at least, All-Powerful God, hold me up that I yield not to it. To Thy glory overthrow the devil in me, even as when he tempted Thee, not by stopping the temptation, but by rejecting it. Grant, Lord, that when the seducing spirit tempts me, either through sensuality, curiosity, or ambition, I may be no more moved than Thou wert in the desert. If he shows me the glory of the world, offering me a share of it provided I will worship him, then turn away mine eyes from vanity, make me to feel the delusion of his empty promises, and root deeply in my heart the truths by which Thou didst overthrow Satan and his wiles. "Thou shalt worship God, and Him you shalt thou serve."

Forgive this digression, dear Duke. I feel the danger to which I am sometimes exposed so keenly, that I tell God all that comes into my mind; and as I can feel little difference between the solicitude I feel for my own salvation and for yours, you need not wonder if I speak for you as for myself. But I must come to an end. . . .

I cannot conceal from you that I hope to see Mme. de Chevreuse become a real saint. There are so many tokens of Christ's Mercy upon her soul, that He will assuredly finish the work He has begun. Yes, He will accomplish it in spite of the world and the devil, and nothing will wrest from Him the lamb which He has purchased with His Blood. I cannot tell you the delight I feel in the hope of seeing those I love wholly God's. You might become a favourite Prime Minister, and I should not feel—so I fancy—any great emotion; but I cannot contemplate you desiring to give yourself wholly and unreservedly to Jesus Christ without the keenest delight.

The Comte de Montfort[1] gives me great hope of late. If I am not mistaken, you will find progress on your return, and the two little ones are satisfactory in their way. O God, make all this family altogether Thine.

Good night, my dear lord.

[1] The Duke's second son.

## LXXVI.

### To the Same.

### At the Festival of Pentecost.

I DO not fail to ask God for the special help which the Duchess needs at present. I ask that she may have that fulness of the Holy Spirit which altogether empties our hearts of the world's spirit. She is not in the same condition as were Mary and the disciples when they received that Holy Spirit Which the world neither knows nor accepts: but I have good reason to believe that, while obliged to be at Court, her heart is a temple, through recollection, self-denial, and devotion to God, consecrated by grace and the Holy Eucharist, fit for the Holy Spirit's indwelling. God grant that His sacred wind may scatter all the dust and rubbish which those who are in the great world cannot fail to gather. God grant that His devouring flames may consume all the straw and foam which will float upon the heart's surface. It is difficult at a period and in a country where everything tends to dissipation to be nowise affected; but it is not impossible to stand fast when strengthened by the Holy Spirit. There is a remarkable sentence in a Church History concerning a pious woman who was exposed to terrible trials in the world: "Tanto pondere fixit eam Spiritus Sanctus, ut immobile permaneret." Such a degree of stedfastness is scarce to be won save by fervent, constant, humble prayer, and to this we must add the frequent reception of that Sacred Body Which, formed by the Holy Spirit, is in itself

an inexhaustible source of holiness. I take the foundation of a Christian life for granted. No further preparation for the Eucharist is needed. Every one who is holy, or somewhat frail only, must partake if he would not gradually waste and perish. Journeys used not to prevent the early Christians from "the breaking of bread." They used to carry their heavenly food with them, for fear of being deprived of it by unforeseen accidents. If we live in the Spirit of Jesus Christ, we have a right to feed upon His Body. May it please that Holy Spirit to shed upon us the same gifts He gave to the first disciples. May we, my dear lord, be inebriated with it, till we forget alike our former weaknesses holding us back and the world's delusions attracting us. May we, like the Apostles, forget all save those eternal truths and blessings with which that Divine inebriation fills the heart. May all else be to us a mere vision—what it truly is, a shadow, a dream. That is what Holy Scripture calls all poor earthly pleasures and perishable gain things which melt away even more speedily than dreams or shadows. A man who has dreamt of riches and luxury says, on waking to his real poverty, "How swiftly my happiness has departed; it was but a dream!" Alas! what will they say, those men whom David describes as "the men whose hands were mighty have found nothing,"[1] when, rising from their sleep, they find hands and hearts alike empty! We call the pleasant vision of a night a dream, but really it is enduring and substantial as compared with the brevity of our life!

[1] Ps. lxxvi. 5.

What shall we call this vision of a moment, even our whole life, when we have entered on eternity? I hardly know why I have run on thus, except that I am so convinced of your religion and goodness that I use neither measure nor check in talking to you of our common hope.

## LXXVII.

### To the Marquis de Seignelai,[1] concerning his Conversion.

1690.

I THANK God, sir, that you entertain so much fear of ceasing to do evil without learning to do good. This fear which He kindles in your heart will be the solid foundation of your work. Not to say that with your disposition you could never be stedfast against evil save by diligently pursuing an active course of good, you would further be the most miserable of men if you were to seek to conquer your passions save by the constant co-operation of God. Your heart would be torn to pieces, and you would be devoid of all the consolation and joy of His Holy Spirit. Your heart must be full either of God or of the world. If of the world, it will drag you unconsciously—it may be suddenly—back into the abyss. If of God, He will not endure a cowardly lukewarmness: conscience will goad you; you will enjoy recollection; the things which once pleased you will seem vain and frivolous; you will

[1] Eldest son of Colbert the Minister, and brother of the Duchesses de Beauvilliers, de Chevreuse, and de Mortemart.

feel a power working within you, before which everything must gradually give way ; in a word, you will not give yourself to God by halves. If you seek mistakenly to share your heart, God, Who is a jealous God, will indignantly reject a compromise which puts Him in competition with His creatures, with very nothingness. So be sure that you have no alternative save to sink through despair into the gulf of iniquity, given up to yourself, to the world, and your own slavish propensities ; or to abandon yourself unreservedly to the Father of Mercies and God of Consolation, Who opens His Arms to you in spite of all your ingratitude. We cannot bargain with God ; He is our Master. We must give ourselves to Him silently, let Him lead us, and not even ask to see where we are going. Abraham forsook his country, and journeyed to a strange land, not knowing whither he went. Let us copy his courage and faith. They who lay down rules and limits in their conversion are self-guiding ; but those who give themselves up unreservedly to God make Him, so to say, responsible for all they do. Do you, sir, return like the prodigal son, and use from the bottom of your heart that trustful petition, "Father, I have sinned against Heaven and against Thee!"

It is impossible to avoid all the suffering which your passions will cause you until they are thoroughly crushed. You will feel powerfully attracted by former pleasures, as S. Augustine says : "The very toys of toys and vanities of vanities, my ancient mistresses, still held me ; they plucked my fleshly garment, and whispered softly, 'Dost thou

cast us off? and shall we be no more with thee for ever?'"[1] But then God in His turn will speak: He will set before you the gladness of a cleansed conscience, the peace of a soul reconciled to God, and the liberty His true sons enjoy. No more of those wild pleasures which intoxicate the soul, which make a man forget his troubles by stunning him; but instead of these that inward calm and repose which strengthen him against all trials. You will be at one with yourself, no longer afraid to gaze within; on the contrary, you will find rest in doing so. You will have nothing to hide or to fear; you will find pleasure in all you do, because you love God's constraining Will; you will no longer desire anything which He withholds; you will bear within you an inexhaustible fund of hope and brightness wherewith to meet life's troubles. So all ills will turn to good; sickness, disappointment, weary toil, death itself—all will become welcome, for "all things work together for good to them that love God."[2] How should you not love Him Who so loves you? Did you ever find anything more loveable or more worthy of love? The fashion of this world will pass away; this empty grandeur will soon vanish; the hour draws near, we have wellnigh reached it; earth's spell will break, our eyes will be opened, and we shall see nought save Eternal Truth, and God judging His ungrateful creatures. All the madmen who now pass as wise will be convicted of their folly, but we who have known and tasted the gift of God, surely

[1] *Conf.*, Bk. VIII. xi. 26, *Lib. of Fathers.*
[2] Rom. viii. 28.

we are not going to let ourselves fall into this condemnation? And you, sir, will you shut your eyes, or but half-open them, when God Himself so patiently calls you to full vision? Read what the Prophet Jeremiah says[1] of the dealings of a man with the wife who has been faithless to him and run after other lovers: "Will he return to her again? . . . But thou," the Lord says to His erring people, "thou hast played the harlot with many lovers, yet return again to Me. . . . Return, ye backsliding children, and I will heal your backslidings." This is how our Jealous God deals with us. His patience and kindness stretch beyond His jealousy. But if He waits for you in love, He requires you to turn to Him bravely and faithfully.

Now, as to the detail of what you need to aim at—internally and externally. As to the first, the chief thing is love of God. It is not a question of warm, sensible love. You cannot win that for yourself, and it is not necessary; God oftener gives it to the weak as a support than to stronger souls whom He proposes to lead by a purer faith. Indeed, men are apt to deceive themselves in such love, to cling to its enjoyment, instead of to God only; and when the enjoyment fails, this devotion of the taste and imagination melts away—they get discouraged, think that all is lost, and fall away. If God facilitates your first beginning with such help, accept it, for He knows better than we do what we need. But do not be troubled if He withholds it. True love of God often consists in a dry, firm resolution to give up everything to Him. Such is the purest

[1] Jer. iii.

service, inasmuch as it is offered without satisfaction, and without any support save self-renunciation. Jesus Christ was "sorrowful, even unto death," in the Garden of Gethsemane, and His shrinking from the cup held to Him by the Father cost Him His Bloody Sweat. What a help to us this example is! How little sensible satisfaction He experienced! Yet He said, "Thy will, not Mine, be done." Let us say the same in dryness, and abide peacefully beneath God's Hand. Remember, too, that you do not deserve the joy of a pure soul which has always followed its Bridegroom faithfully. How often you have kept Him waiting at the door of your heart! it is but fair that you should in your turn be kept waiting. You ought not to be surprised at your distractions in prayer; they are inevitable after so much voluntary excitement and dissipation, but they will not hurt you if you bear them patiently. The only real danger is if they discourage you. What matter if the imagination wanders, and the mind launches out in a thousand foolish notions, so long as the will keeps firm, and you return quietly to God directly that you are conscious of your distraction? While you maintain such a simple course your very distractions may be turned to good, and you will find it out at last, though God may for a while hide it from you. Prayer should be simple, heartfelt, rather than intellectual; short, earnest, simple reflections, straightforward towards God, not attempting to force unreal feelings. It will suffice to make the chief acts of faith, love, hope, and contrition; all done unconstrainedly, and following the leadings of your heart. God is exacting as to

an upright, honest service, but He is equally indulgent as to all else. No tender, indulgent friend was ever so tender as He is. You might make your meditation on those passages in the Psalms which touch you most. Every time that your attention flags take up your book and do not be uneasy. Uneasiness at distractions is the worst of distractions.

Nothing is better than to mistrust yourself; it is the fruit you should gather from your falls. God has permitted them to be so frequent, so deep, so prolonged, in order to humble you; and after so many past graces you needed more than most men to fall low in order to crush your excessive pride, which is ever ready to rear its head anew. But mistrust of self must not lessen your confidence in God. It ought to help you in avoiding occasions of relapse; it ought to lead you to adopt precautions against yourself and your friends, but it ought not to make you doubt God's Help. If He sought you while you fled from Him, while you closed your ears lest you should hear His Voice, how much more will He lead you step by step now that you are seeking Him! Do not fear, there is joy in Heaven over your repentance. So beware of being uneasy as to your conversion, or striving to hide it, lest it fail, and so others be scandalised. That would assuredly happen if you reckoned on your own strength. Your courage, however great, would be as that broken reed of Holy Scripture: so far from sustaining you, it would pierce your hand. But give yourself up to God; do not make yourself conspicuous, but, on the other hand, do not be ashamed of the Gospel.

Such false shame would hinder God's Blessing on your penitence ; I should fear that a hundred times more than your weakness. Do not fear disgrace if you were again to forsake Him ; you would deserve it, and it would be the least evil of such a fall. So do nothing to attract attention, but neither seek to hide your desire to do right. Let God provide for all, and be satisfied to go on in the ordinary way. From the first you must cut off whatever might be a cause of scandal. Do not imagine you can hide yourself long from your friends and servants when they see you do this as well as perform the duties which no Christian can leave undone without giving scandal. You must hear Mass humbly, speak quietly and cautiously. All this will soon give the impression that you are returning, at all events, to an orderly way of life ; and you may be sure that the world, which always exaggerates, will conclude that you are becoming devout. But what then ? Let it talk, and be content only to show that which cannot be concealed. God will bear the burthen for you, and His angels will take care that you do not hurt your foot against the stones which bestrew your path. The great thing is never to look back. Cut off all the paths by which whatever is calculated to kindle you might find entrance ; the merest trifle would open all your wounds, and poison them as well. Suffer no friend or servant to bring you letters, or tell you anything about the persons from whom you have separated. . . . It is easy in your position to cut all such matters short, you only have to use your will ; and as it affects your eternal salvation, you should have no hesitation in so willing.

Where I see the greatest difficulty lie is neither in your sharpness with your servants nor your vehemence against those who cross you; what I fear most is your natural haughtiness, and your violent inclination for pleasure. I dread your pride, because you cannot give yourself to God, and be filled with His Spirit, unless you are emptied of self, and despise it heartily. God is jealous of His Own Glory, and that of men offends Him. "He resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble;"[1] and, "The Lord hath plucked up the roots of the proud nations, and planted the lowly in their place."[2] He plucks them up, you see; that is, He destroys their very life. He will never give you His Blessing unless you are lowly in His Sight, unless you renounce worldly glory. Then as to your leaning to pleasure, I should indeed tremble, but that I am convinced God, Who has begun the good work in you, will complete it. But you are so surrounded with mere pleasure-seekers, there is such an atmosphere of mere amusement all around you, all your most intimate friends are so imbued with sensual ideas, and so accustomed to share them with you, that it is an absolute necessity that you make an entire change of tone. Ask, then, for an iron strength against evil; ask that mouth of wisdom which God has promised to His servants, that they may triumph over worldly wisdom. It is not a question of preaching or merely turning aside; you must know how to be silent, how to turn conversation, how never to show any cowardly indulgence to what is evil, how never to laugh at a loose jest or an impure

[1] James iv. 6. [2] Ecclus. x. 15.

witticism. Let people think what they please, but you must hold your own. Your high position and your natural gifts will enable you to do this. But remember, sir, that if you allow yourself to be trifled with, you are lost! A feeble compromise between God and the world will satisfy neither. God will reject you, and the world will drag you back into its vortex, and laugh at you for falling into its snares. You can only be saved from this by an upright bearing, full of confidence in God, and setting aside earthly considerations. As to the interior change you have to make, the most important point, which I implore you in the Name of God to heed, is to be fully resolved to do two things: First, to receive without hesitation whatever light God may possibly give hereafter to lead you further than you at present contemplate. For instance, promise Him heartily that, if as yet you do not see all you owe to Him, whether in reparation of past impurity or injustice, misuse of means or authority, you will never shut your eyes to the light, but, on the contrary, you will always strive to advance in realising your duty. Secondly, you must maintain a firm and genuine resolution to follow God's light always, and at whatever cost; so that if hereafter He shows you fresh duties to fulfil and fresh victories to be won over self, you may never resist the Holy Spirit, but boldly trample under foot all difficulties which would hinder you. With these two intentions I think you will have a firm foundation, and we shall not have the sorrow of seeing you fall away. . . . Your religious exercises cannot be according to the same rule now as eventually when

your health is restored. For the present be content to take such portions of the Psalms as you may select during the morning, when you are strongest, and least interrupted by visitors; give a quarter of an hour to the purpose, if you can. If you are not well enough, do it at intervals, during the hours you are most able. Read, or get the Duke [de Chevreuse] to read to you a chapter of the *Imitation* daily. Do not mind stopping if you are tired, but resume it afterwards. Further, what will help you most is to lift up your heart to God from time to time, without any reserve, and in full confidence. This season of sickness is in your favour; it is a sort of enforced retreat, which shields you from worldly society, and brings the worthiest members of your family to your side. A little Christian conversation with the Duke will strengthen your good convictions. A man needs sympathy in so difficult a conversion, and confidential friendship both comforts and opens the heart to God's influences. I pray that He may uphold you against the world and yourself with His All-powerful Hand. You remind me, lying in your bed, of Saul overthrown and crushed before the gates of Damascus. Jesus Christ, Whom you have so long forsaken and insulted, says, "Why persecutest thou Me? It is hard to kick against the pricks." Do you reply, "Lord, what wouldst Thou have me to do?" and He will make you a chosen vessel bearing His Name.

## LXXVIII.

### To the Same.

### On unreserved seeking God.

*July* 2, 1690.

THE most important of all your questions seems to be that concerning ignorance of your duties. You would fain believe that you may rest in what you know, without taking any pains to know more: but I must own I cannot agree to this. Not that I would approve an excessive, injudicious severity, which constrains a man to tremble continually, whatever he does, lest it be wrong. We have a good Master, Who cares more for our confidence than ought else. "Like as a father pitieth his own children, even so is the Lord merciful unto them that fear Him. For He knoweth whereof we are made; He remembereth that we are but dust."[1]

So He has declared Himself; therefore God forbid, sir, that I should wish to fetter you with a timid, constrained religion, which believes that God pardons nothing, but that He is ever seeking to pounce upon our most trivial faults in order to discomfit us utterly! I know nothing more injurious than such a system; and so far from wishing to press it upon you, I would fain guide you by pure love, which is always easy, unconstrained, cheerful, brave, treading freely, and inspirited by confidence. I repeat it: God knows I think those directors who choose that other rigid, toilsome path are grievously

[1] Ps. ciii. 13, 14.

mistaken, and likely to ruin their work. But, on the other hand, let us honestly consider what we owe to God.

Perhaps you have never seriously thought of it? Do we not owe as much to Him as friend to friend, or servant to master? If you had a friend whom you had trusted to the utmost, who was under the deepest obligations to you, and whom you loved tenderly, would you be satisfied if he only cared to hear part of your wishes as to what he should do for you? What would you think of him and of his friendship if he was satisfied with a general idea of your intentions, and avoided entering into detail? Would you not press explanations of his trust upon him? Would you not seek interviews with him, for fear of his making mistakes? Would he deserve to be called a friend; and would you believe him to be in earnest if he were to say, "I am doing what I fancied my friend required; what more do I care to know? I don't want to be troubled; the imperfect knowledge I possess of his interests is enough, better information might only involve me in what would be inconvenient. I will not take the trouble. I should be very sorry to offend him in essential matters, but I do not care to worry myself about his wishes in trifles, or even in greater things; I know quite enough, and I would rather damage him to some extent than incur the disagreeables of further explanation." Surely you would count such a friend unworthy of the name; you would be mortally wounded by his ingratitude, and feel ashamed of having trusted him. Indeed, I think you would consider his conduct all the

worse in that he added bad faith to ill-will. You would rather he had openly refused to serve you; but to offer his service, and then seek pretexts for ignoring your interests, and shun daylight lest he should be obliged to do too much, seems altogether inexcusable. I think, sir, this is what you would say of an ordinary friend. What, then, will God say of you at the Day of Judgment of you who owe everything to Him, if you are like that faithless friend, who affects to close his eyes lest he see too plainly what his friend requires, even while making profession of attachment? Or again, if the king had intrusted a fort, or an army, or a negotiation to some subject, would he be pleased if that man neglected to inform himself accurately as to the condition and strength of the fort? If the general were content to know but little of the art of war? if the ambassador refused to fathom foreign affairs, or the means to insure a successful diplomacy? If the king hereafter reproached these men with their failure, would the governor dare to say, "I thought I knew enough, though I did not understand sieges, and I did not trouble to learn more that I might hold the fort"? Or the ignorant general, could he answer, "I did not care to bother myself with the various opinions of engineers as to defence, or to discuss the matter with officers who could have enlightened me by their experience; I was satisfied with my good intentions. I thought my good-will and my slender capacity were excuse for me, and that you would be content provided I did not betray you"? Or the ambassador, would he presume to allege that he was not bound to fathom

an enemy's plans, or to heed the undercurrents of the court to which he was sent, or the means of effecting his master's objects? Surely the king would answer, "You should have watched day and night to find all this out; neglect was a betrayal of my interests, a sacrifice of them to mere sloth." What, then, will the King of Kings say if you are even as these evil servants?

You surely see, sir, that you would never forgive such affectation of ignorance, and that God can still less be expected to forgive it you. Moreover, the observation of the Lord's Day was expressly instituted that there might be one day in each week reserved for the study of God's Law, and for meditation on His Mysteries. And formerly those who became Christians were put under a long course of instruction before they were admitted to Baptism. The need to know God and Jesus Christ our Saviour is fully as great now, and never can be less; the Gospel whereby God teaches us is not given us to be a closed book. I know there are evil-minded, untrained men who might misuse their knowledge of it; but those who are prepared by means of a pure intention and teachable mind should not deprive themselves of its use. Be sure that we shall be judged by that Book, not by the judgment of man; therefore we should make ready to give our account according to its rules, which are God's.

S. Paul tells the early Christians, "In everything ye are enriched by Him, in all utterance, and in all knowledge."[1] Nevertheless he continually urges upon them the need of increasing daily in the

[1] 1 Cor. i. 5.

knowledge of God; of being enlightened, that they may know His Will in all wisdom and understanding, and so become fruitful in every good work."[1]

Any one who really loves a friend is not content merely not to offend him, but seeks out every possible means of pleasing him. True affection is ingeniously inventive. It is a mere slavish fear which only aims at avoiding punishment for actual disobedience. No one would be satisfied with a servant who never did anything he could leave undone, and cared nothing to find out what his master wished.

Jesus Christ teaches the duty of a careful investigation of His Law, and of sifting even the sources of instruction, when He says, "If the blind lead the blind, both shall fall into the ditch."[2] Observe, He does not say that one shall excuse the other: but, on the contrary, the blind guide will only drag his neighbour into the ditch. You will say, Are we then to be continually running from one teacher to another, never knowing where to stop? Surely such uncertainty would disturb any one's conscience!

I quite agree. But what I do say is, that men ought to do as much for the eternal life of their souls as they never fail to do for their fleeting bodily life. When we are ill, we do not think it too much trouble to seek the most experienced physician or the most skilful surgeon, and we should think him very foolish who was indifferent on this score; common sense leaves us no doubt in such a case. Do as much for your soul. Do

[1] Col. i. 9, 10. [2] Matt. xv. 14.

not be satisfied without taking the advice of those whom you believe to be wisest, most upright, most disinterested. Shun those who are rigid through ostentation, asperity, or love of novelty; but beware of seeking mere flattering counsellors, worldly-minded men, who "sew pillows to all armholes,"[1] instead of teaching repentance; or ignorant men, who deceive alike themselves and you. Use all the light God gives you to find a happy medium; seek a spiritual guide as carefully as a worldly man seeks the best lawyer or physician. Then you may rest satisfied, and trust to God's Goodness, Who will not suffer you to be the loser, even if you should be mistaken in your choice.

But, you will ask, must one spend one's life in religious study like a professor? No; that is not what God requires of you. He requires you to feed your soul daily upon the truths of His Gospel; not to make you arrogant, but to teach you greater mistrust of self, and that you may learn of Jesus Christ to be "meek and lowly of heart." You will not learn therefrom a vain knowledge which puffeth up. You will only learn to despise self, to tread under foot the worthless treasures of this world, to sit loose to a fleeting, uncertain life, to seek God's enduring Greatness; to be gentle, patient, just, honest towards your neighbour. Such knowledge is not attained by subtle reasoning, deep reading, or a powerful memory; all you need is a simple, teachable spirit, which, without any unwonted cleverness, will go deep in the science of godliness. You will learn the most profound truths

[1] Ezek. xiii. 18.

in few words ; and if really humble, you will know more than the most learned of proud, wise men. Thus it is that Jesus Christ says, "I thank Thee, O Father, because Thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes ;"[1] and, "Except ye become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven."[2] So that the knowledge to be sought in daily meditation on God's Word is how to become lowly as a little child.

I have dwelt at so much length on this subject, sir, that I have not time to go on to the other points of your letter. May God bring it home to you. I must not, however, omit to point out to you that the first commandment alone would suffice to upset all your excuses and force your strongholds. "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart and all thy soul, with all thy mind and all thy strength." See how many terms are united by the Holy Spirit, so as to forestall the reserves which man was sure to make with regard to a Love which exacts the sacrifice of everything. It is a jealous, all-prevailing Love ; all is not too much for it. It will admit of no division, and permits no love out of God, save that which He Himself enjoins for His Own Sake. We must love Him, not only with all the strength and power of our heart, but with all the weight of our intellect; so how can we pretend to love Him if we will not ponder His Law and strive to learn His Will? It is self-deceit to fancy that we can give Him such a diligent, watchful love, while we shrink

[1] Matt. xi. 25. [2] Matt. xviii. 3.

from perceiving the consequences it must entail. There is but one genuine way of loving, and that is not to bargain with Him, but to follow on with a free heart, eager to know His Adorable Will Who has made us out of nothing, and redeemed us by His Own Blood from eternal destruction. All who seek to love God a little for fear of punishment, but who are voluntarily deaf, and strive not to hear when He speaks of detachment from the world and from self, run a great risk of being found among the lukewarm whom our Lord has declared that He will cast out.[1] But we who seek to be His unreservedly, peace and mercy will be with us, and the recompense of our sacrifice will be the hundred-fold promised in this life, as well as the kingdom of heaven. Freedom of heart, peace of conscience, the rest of lying still in God's Hands, the joy of seeing His Light ever brighter and brighter, and the dropping off of worldly fears and hopes, make this hundred-fold happiness which the faithful children of God experience, even amid the heaviest crosses. Is it not very weak to fear to enter upon so desirable a state? "A double-minded man is unstable in all his ways."[2] The double mind is for ever distracted between the world and its passions and the fears of conscience. Blessed are they who throw themselves blindly into the Arms of the God of Mercy and Father of all Comfort![3] So far from fearing to see too plainly, they only fear lest they see not God's Will enough; and so soon as they gain any fresh light, they are "as glad as one that

[1] Rev. iii. 16. [2] James i. 8. [3] 2 Cor. i. 3.

findeth great spoils."[1] As to reading, and the general disposition of time, I will write again soon. This letter is already too long.

## LXXIX.

### To the Same.

### The Benefits of Sickness.

*July* 14, 1690.

I HEAR that you are very suffering, and that God is trying you severely by the continuance of pain. If I were to give way to natural feeling, I should grieve; but I believe that God smites you in love, and am convinced that your sufferings will turn to real gain. He has laid a penance on you which you would never have had courage to assume for yourself, and which yet you owe in expiation for your sins. He takes forcibly what you would scarcely have been able to give, and so doing, He deprives you of any vainglory, so that you cannot pride yourself on your sacrifice; and thus He both humbles and teaches you. Moreover, He keeps you in a helpless state, which overthrows all your ambitious views: all the lofty notions on which you have so long fed have melted away; your wisdom is confounded, and so God forces you to turn to Him only. He was jealous of a journey in which worldly glory would have filled all your thoughts, and in which you would have been a prey to the most violent passions. Of a truth, sir, I think that in frustrating that journey He has not

[1] Ps. cxix. 162.

merely preserved your soul from great danger, but also your body from most fatal excitement. He would have you live, and live to Him only; and to lead you to this life He causes you to pass through this intense languor in which you can find no human stay. After having afflicted you, He will comfort you as a tender Father, when affliction has detached and purified your heart. I beseech Him to give you boundless patience amid your keen and prolonged sufferings. Would that I could be your nurse, and help to soothe them!

## LXXX.

### To the Same.
### Comfort in Suffering.

*July* 18, 1690.

YOU ask for some thoughts to comfort you amid your sufferings. Cannot you see that you should take courage from those very sufferings, as a lively proof of God's care for you? What a blessing to bear a penance not of your own choosing, but laid on you by God Himself! It is not merely an expiation for the past, but an antidote for the future. It turns you forcibly from those ambitious schemes which you would never have had courage to sacrifice to God; it holds you between life and death, between the most important affairs and utter helplessness in all; it brings you to the gate of death, and fetches you back after letting you face the gulf which swallows up all that the world holds choicest. God overthrows you like S. Paul before Damascus

and whispers in your heart, "It is hard for thee to kick against the pricks." After all this, can you question that He loves you? If He did not, would He not have left you to your own devices? Would He have pursued you when you fled so ungratefully from Him? Had you deserved such patience and such renewal of an oft-rejected grace? You had stifled the Spirit of Grace, you had done despite to the Spirit of Truth, you had trodden under foot the Blood of the Covenant, you were a child of wrath, and yet God was not weary. He loved you in spite of yourself. You were determined to perish, and He would not have it so. He has revived grace in you. You love Him, or at least you wish to love Him; you dread not loving Him, you abhor yourself when you face your sins and His Goodness. Do you suppose that without the help of His Spirit one can wish to love Him; fear lest one does not, abhor one's own sins? No indeed, God only can make such a great change in a soul as far astray and as hardened as yours was; and when God does thus, who can doubt that He loves your soul with an infinite love? He sees the leprosy which disfigured you far plainer than you saw it; it was the very multitude of your sores which, far from revolting Him, drew His compassion to you. What does sovereign Mercy need, save utter misery through which to glorify itself? You were indeed a fitting object for His Grace; it shines forth in you more than in most. Another man might imagine that his orderly life had won him grace. But what had you done save offend God, and that by terrible relapses? What did He owe you? Nought save

hell, and that even more than most men. So that of His Own Good Pleasure He gives to you, for He owes you less than nothing. His Grace is pure grace to you, and for His Own Glory He causes this gulf of misery and corruption to overflow with mercy. So you may say with S. Paul, "For this cause I obtained mercy, that in me Jesus Christ might show forth all longsuffering, for a pattern to them that should hereafter believe on Him."[1] O all ye who seem to have filled up the measure of iniquity, behold me, and never despair of our Heavenly Father's Goodness! There is but one sin which makes us unworthy of that Mercy, and that is if we harden ourselves against it, and refuse to hope for it. Of course you must not reckon on your own strength, or talents, or courage. All that is your own will fail you, and you will incur the curse, "Cursed is the man who trusteth in man, and maketh flesh his arm,"[2] if you lean on yourself; but the more you feel your own powerlessness, the more you must open your heart to the All-Powerful God Who says, "Fear not; for I am with thee."[3] He will turn all ills into blessings; the body's sickness will be the soul's cure. You will bless God for having smitten you with these visible wounds to heal the deeper and more mortal wounds of pride and luxury in your heart. Gradually you will see the hidden place of mercy as it expands. Do not delay to give glory to God by yielding yourself unconditionally to Him; the more you trust in Him, the more you will constrain Him to care for you. I pray with all my heart that He may give

[1] 1 Tim. i. 16. [2] Jer. xvii. 5. [3] Isa. xli. 10.

you the peace and comfort which is to be found in Him only.

## LXXXI.

### To the Same.

YOU ask how to maintain a sense of God's Presence amid trial? I hope, to begin with, that you feel how trials are in themselves calculated to keep us continually in His Presence. What more natural than when suffering to seek relief? and what a relief there is to be found by a loving glance at God! When your pains come on, you summon the physicians, and those relations whom you believe most able to support you: even in like manner summon the Great Physician, Who is all the more able to understand and soothe your sufferings in that it is His Mercy which has laid them on you. Summon the only Friend, the true Comforter, the Loving Father, Who will carry you in His Bosom, and will either give you relief from pain or courage to bear its pressure patiently. Is it not good to know that we have such a resource in God, and that it can never fail us? He is ever ready to hearken. He knows our every pang better than we know it; He lays it on us because He would fain spare us the eternal pangs which we have deserved. It is He Who excites within us the very cry for help we raise. And He has said, "Before they call, I will answer; and while they are yet speaking, I will hear."[1] If sometimes He seems slow to deliver or comfort us, it is that He treats us like

[1] Isa. lxv. 24.

Lazarus, whom He loved: He waited purposely some days, and let him die in order to raise him up. God seems slow about healing you, because He is leaving you to suffer so that you may die to self and to the world's corruption. When all your lusts are extinguished, when your pride is humbled to the dust, when you begin to be insensible to false shame and pernicious indulgence for your profligate friends, when you have sacrificed everything unreservedly to God, and the old man in you has neither hope nor prospect, then I believe that God will show forth His Glory. He will recall you to a pure life worthy of Him; He will set you before the world like a risen Lazarus, not to resume a base, idle, profane life, but to be a witness to an unbelieving world of God's marvellous power, which convinces the faithless, silences the malice of the evil one, and draws sinners to conversion.

And amid your sufferings say to God, Let me forget myself, but never forget Thee. "Memor fui Dei, et delectatus est."[1] My pain is inevitable, for I cannot escape Thy Just and All-Powerful Hand; I must suffer, for I have sinned, and my sentence of condemnation is gone forth. The only thing is whether to suffer with the despair of a self-supporting mind, or with the comfort of hoping in Thee; with self-love goaded to madness by pain, or with peace through love of Thee and confidence in Thy unfailing Goodness. Impatience relieves no ill; on the contrary, it is a sharp additional pang added to all the rest. But resignation soothes and lightens

[1] This is the Vulgate, Ps. lxxvi. 4; in the English Version this sense is lost.

all we suffer by showing the gain that is behind. I intreat you then, sir, to cast yourself into God's Arms, there to find the best of comfort. Be sure that it will prove less a sacrifice of your own will than a lightening of your pain. If you use yourself by degrees to seek confidently from God all which is lacking in yourself, you will gradually acquire a blessed, peaceful habit of turning to Him whenever trial presses, as a baby nestles to its nurse's breast when anything frightens or hurts it. The reason you feel it difficult thus to turn to Him is that you do it with effort, without simple trust, rather as a sacrifice than as seeking comfort. God would have you more unconstrained with Him. Turn to Him less with a thought of giving than of receiving; you can give Him nothing save what you have received of Him. Open your heart to Him unceasingly, and you will receive patience and love. If patience fails you under pressure of pain, appeal to God for support, as you would call to a passer-by for help under an overwhelming burthen. And if you yield to impatience, do not add the further evil of discouragement. To be impatient of our impatience is to poison the wound; rather lift your eyes to the Physician, and show Him the depth of your wound, that He may pour in His healing balm. Abide calm and humble under God's Hand, remembering your pride, impatience, sensitiveness, and weakness. Nothing could be more suited to confound your pride than the reflections God has forced upon you. You have but one way of doing good, and that is to bear patiently and meekly; all other means of sacrifice are gone from you. You

have no longer the snares of business or the seductions of society to encounter. You are shut up within a Christian household, and all you can do is to endure; and this you do so badly, that it alone might suffice to destroy all self-confidence in you. How many guileless people are suffering worse pains than yours without any of your unmerited alleviations! Try often to lie still before God and think over all these things. A word from the Psalms or Gospels, or any other passage of Holy Scripture which strikes you, will be enough to lift up your heart to God from time to time. But such upliftings should be simple, unforced, brief, familiar; they may be made in the midst of those around you without any one observing you. Besides you have an advantage not to be overlooked in the power of speaking on religious subjects with your own family. When such conversations are natural and easy, they strengthen and encourage the soul, help it under trial, comfort it under pressure of temptation, open the closed heart, and give a peace which self-contained people seldom have.[1] Your reading and prayers should be very short in your present state; mind and body need to be spared. Short, simple upliftings of heart to God on any touching passages of Scripture will be more useful to you than long meditations. While listening to conversation the heart may often recollect itself within, and feed secretly upon God. Silence is very needful both to your body and your soul. "In quietness and in confidence shall be your strength."[2]

[1] The Marquis de Seignelai's illness terminated fatally at the close of the year in which these letters were written.

[2] Isa. xxx. 15.

## LXXXII.

### To the Duc de Chevreuse.

I AM not surprised that your son[1] shrinks from writing to . . . It costs the natural man dearly when he is detached, or, more truly, torn from his pleasures. I remember his late elder brother writing to me once to intreat that I would not pray for him, for fear he should have to give up a connection to which he clung. It is the result of our corrupt self-will, which is so passionate, and cannot endure to part from what stirs its affections. You know that such self-will cannot be reformed, altered, eradicated, save by submission to God's Will; by resignation, union, and the very merging our will in His. As the opposite to all this causes the disorder of our life, so that life becomes better regulated as the will turns to God; and as it so turns we let go the empty pleasures which fetter us, because the will can only change through love. The object is not to enlighten the mind, but the heart.

I do not know why people should fancy they must give up their friends in order to give themselves to God; or why the Vidame should suppose that at his age he must forsake society which is neither criminal nor dangerous, nor even over-attractive. He should see his friends frequently, if briefly. I must urge that conviction alone will never bring a man thoroughly to God. Nothing

[1] The Vidame d'Amiens, fifth son of the Duc de Chevreuse, and later Duc de Chaulnes.

but winning and converting the will can do that; all arguments are fruitless unless the heart be won to God, and it is at that we must work. I should try to do as follows: daily to come before God for some few moments, not actively, but often saying, "Thy Will be done," giving my will up to God, and lying before Him in reverent silence while the heart speaks without help of intellect or words. I would have your son follow this little exercise daily, and I will answer for it that he will not do so long without finding a result. I pray God to let him find by experience that this counsel, which seems so easy and trifling in itself, may in the long run be of so much use to him that he will be surprised at it. He will then not need many external acts for the carrying out of God's Will, because his own will be altogether moulded upon that.

## LXXXIII.

### To the Same.
### Some Rules of Life.

My Dear Duke,

Your letter has been an unspeakable pleasure to me, and is a proof to me how intensely I love you. I think that you enter at least by conviction into that which God requires of you, and without which your work would be useless. . . . As to meditation, I think you had better use a book which you can lay aside whenever God alone occupies your heart. Any of those you mention, full of unction and love, will do; take whatever helps you best to realise

God's Presence and still the activity of your own mind.

As to the time for meditation, I would spread it, if possible, over different parts of the day: some in the morning, when you need not be visible sooner than you please; and some in the evening, when, under the excuse of business, you can always secure half an hour in your study, and give to meditation what you might give to science—a double gain, sacrificing your mental tastes and living to God. Again, your frequent journeys are very convenient for meditation in your carriage; and the times spent at Marly are also opportunities for retirement and freedom. I do not suggest any precise length of meditation, because you had better be guided by your feelings or needs. If you are drawn to spend a long time in prayer, I would give to it as much as your health and your other duties permit. If you feel less attraction to it, but know by experience that it is only a certain perseverance which overcomes distractions and silences self, then I would patiently give such time to meditation as is necessary to attain the interior silence which is so necessary to you. So I cannot give you any fixed rule, but God will make it plain to you. Do in this matter as we do in taking mineral waters—begin by degrees, and gradually increase the dose. Then tell me the result of your experience.

As to Communion, I quite approve of your communicating two or three times a week, but I would rather that you were guided in this respect by your inward desire or need than by set days. I would

have you vary somewhat the church where you communicate, so as not to attract notice as a public man. As to confession, you are right not to go formally, or on set days. It will suffice to go when you feel the need clearly; you will not carry that too far, I know.

The most difficult thing is to find some one to whom you can open your heart. The good . . .[1] will not give you breadth; he is too narrow himself. I can only think of . . . who is not without faults, but you can freely mention those. . . . The counsels people give generally only wound, because they are given as though infallibly correct. One should neither judge, nor insist on being believed. One must say what one thinks, not authoritatively, and as blaming our friend if he does not submit, but merely out of the fulness and openness of one's heart, and to avoid reserve with a person one loves, while content to be unheeded, and conscious that one may be mistaken. Advice given thus rarely gives offence. If true, it glides gradually into the heart, and brings forth fruit; if mistaken, one is glad to be undeceived.

The good . . .[2] is quick, free, and brusque; but she is good, simple, straightforward, and firm with herself as far as she knows how. She has sobered down very much during the last two years. She is not perfect; but who is? . . . She loves you, and you her; you know each other well, and meet often; you will do her good, and I think she will return it with interest. . . . If she speaks too freely,

[1] Probably this meant the Duc de Beauvilliers.

[2] This seems meant for the Duchesse de Beauvilliers.

tell her so, and she will be checked ; and if you are too strict in advising her, she will tell you in like manner. I think you may mutually help one another much. . . .

## LXXXIV.

### To the Madame d'Amiens.

### On putting an End to an Unlawful Connection.

*May 28, 1705.*

. . I DO not wish either to flatter or to discourage you about the matter in question, but you will have no real peace till it is carried out. What you say is all true ; but when a man knows himself, as you do, he is greatly to blame if he does not take strong measures for himself.

What I ask of you is a courageous effort, vigorously to begin what you must see cannot be too soon carried out, and not to give heed to your own pleadings any longer. You will spare yourself great pain and danger, as well as others, by one decided blow. The only way of softening a painful operation is to perform it promptly ; nor can you be sure of carrying it out at all, knowing by experience how much cause you have to mistrust yourself, save by putting yourself into the desirable position of being unable to draw back. If you honestly wish to act, why hesitate so artfully to delay the deed, and make it more and more difficult ? Reserve a free quarter of an hour daily, morning and evening, in which to draw strength from the One true Source. If you will do this faithfully, you will be amazed to find yourself so much stronger and

clearer than you dared to hope. Try it perseveringly, and tell me the result. One cannot satisfy one's self or others while carrying about a better knowledge which one will neither follow nor stifle. One is afraid of one's self, dare not be alone, or examine one's own heart. . . . Set yourself free. Freedom lies in not being misled by weakness, in spite of conviction, and the better knowledge of your heart. It will be hard at first, but less so than you think; and the short pain will turn to endless satisfaction. Horace, pagan and libertine as he was, says, "sapere aude," and "dimidium facti, qui cæpit, habet." Do you expect that deliverance from what costs you so dearly should cost nothing? I await you firmly, and you shall not find me so easy a victory as Milord Marlborough.

## LXXXV.

### To the Same.
### On Returning to God.

CAMBRAI, *June* 25, 1706.

NO one could be more touched than I am by your troubles and your sincerity. I hope that the way in which you open your heart will help to heal it. I ask it daily of God. His Mercy spares nothing to break your bonds and help you to get entirely free. It is time for you to answer to so much grace. Why do you want to love that which no longer loves you, and prefer it to God, Who has loved you through all your wanderings, and does not weary of waiting for you?

You did not mistrust yourself enough when it was a question of breaking loose and flying; and now you mistrust God too much when it is a question of hoping for His upholding grace. The separation which you had not courage to make is made for you; it only remains to let it be lasting, and not to renew that to which God's Goodness has put an end. Now is the time to hope in Him. Do not be afraid that you cannot persevere; God will lighten your difficulties. Give yourself innocent amusements, and such little occupations as distract you usefully and direct your tastes. Every day try a little reading and prayer. I forgive you for having been afraid of me, and avoided me, and delighted not to find me. It is all the natural result of your unhappy state. But I shall seek none the less after you. God wants you. Just see all that He has done to secure you, and all that you are doing to escape Him! Do not wear out His Patience, nor do evil because He is good. Throw yourself into His Arms in spite of yourself. Why cannot I come and see you? I would lay down my life for your genuine, lasting conversion.

## LXXXVI.

### To the Same.
### On the same Subject.

*July* 5, 1706.

. . . THERE are two beings in you who will never agree. If you wish for any peace, one or other must conquer. Please God, the reasonable Chris-

tian man will never be so overthrown in you as to cease making you feel an inward struggle. And you can know no real peace in letting him be defeated. Your only resource is to uphold him without relaxation, and at whatever cost, against the blind, deluded man who has nothing strong about him save his unreasoning passions. The more you conquer him, the more peace and comfort you will know. Such passions are like a decayed tooth which must be drawn: the preparations are alarming, but the actual pain is short; you fall asleep as soon as the operation is over, and it is only by this sharp pain that you can be relieved. Besides, there is more suffering from delays and irresolution than from a speedy though painful operation. . . . Pray heartily; seek after God in the depths of your heart. In spite of your unworthiness, fly to Him with the freedom and familiarity of a child who cannot doubt his father's kindness. Tell Him all your difficulties, all the evil suggestions of self-will, all your distaste for what is right, all your fear of being too far involved in it to draw back, and implore Him to take what you do not know how to give.

## LXXXVII.

### To the Same.

### Exhortation to Amendment of Life.

CAMBRAI, *Feb.* 9, 1707.

. . . THIS winter is very valuable to you. How do you know but that it is the last of your life?

It may be that the zealous, earnest, though tender attempts of your father to confirm you in good are the last words of exhortation you will hear; the impressions of grace which you now feel may be the last which God's Mercy will make on your heart. "To-day if ye will hear His Voice, harden not your heart."[1] God had so great pity on your weakness that He snatched that from you which you would never have had courage to give Him. He has overthrown everything in spite of you. He has broken your bonds, and yet you will not be at liberty? What more would you have Him do to help forward your salvation? Perilous times are at hand: "The day of calamity is at hand, and the things that shall come upon them make haste."[2] You do not fear for your body, but at least fear for your soul. Despise human weapons if you will, but do not despise God's judgments. Alas! His very mercies make me tremble for you; so much grace trodden under foot cannot but be avenged. Nothing is so terrible as the Wrath of the Lamb.

What holds you back from serving God? You believe in His Truths; you hope for His Blessings; you acknowledge the mad folly of impiety; you feel the vanity, the hollowness of this life, the deception of the world, the venom of prosperity, the treachery of all that seems flattering, the speedy flight of all that is perishable. You have been set free from bondage in spite of yourself; your chains are broken, and yet you will not enjoy the liberty of the children of God. You cannot

[1] Ps. xcv. 8. [2] Deut. xxxii. 35.

find anything worthy of sharing your heart. Why delay seeking peace and life at their sole Source. "Oh, taste and see how gracious the Lord is!' You will indeed be guilty if you resist the many' advances God has made. How patient He has been with you, and how you have made Him wait! How often you have rejected Him for the most unworthy pleasures! O my dear Vidame, defer no longer; open your heart to Him, begin to pray, to read prayerfully, to live by rule, to fulfil your duties, to conquer your love of pleasure. On this score even the wicked world is at one with God. Forgive me for preaching thus.

## LXXXVIII.

### To the Same.

### On Prayer and Meditation.

*May 31, 1707*

YOU ask to be taught how to pray, and how to seek union with God, so as to be sustained against life's temptations, and I am sure you greatly desire to find the help you need in this holy practice. I think you cannot treat God with too much confidence. Tell Him all that is in your heart, as one unloads one's heart to a dear friend of all that gives it pain or pleasure. Tell Him your troubles, that He may comfort you; tell Him your joys, that He may sober them; tell Him your longings, that He may purify them; tell Him your mislikings, that He may help you to conquer them; talk to Him of your temptations, that He may shield you from

them ; show Him all the wounds of your heart, that He may heal them. Lay bare to Him your indifference to good, your depraved tastes for evil, your dissipation, your instability, your leanings to a corrupt world. Tell Him how self-love disposes you to be unjust to your neighbours, how vanity tempts you to be insincere, and to dazzle those with whom you are concerned ; how your pride disguises you to yourself as well as to others. If you thus pour out to Him all your weakness, needs, and troubles, there will be no lack of what to say ; you will never exhaust this subject, it is continually being renewed. People who have no secrets from each other never want subjects of conversation ; they do not premeditate or weigh their words, because there is nothing to be kept back. Neither do they seek for something to say ; they talk together out of the abundance of their heart—without consideration, just what they think. The heart of each speaks to the other ; they pour out, so to say, one into another. Blessed are they who attain to such familiar, unreserved intercourse with God !

In proportion as you talk to Him He will talk to you ; and often you should be silent and let Him speak, so that you may listen in the stillness of your heart. Say, "Speak, Lord, for Thy servant heareth ;"[1] and, "I will hearken what the Lord will say concerning me."[2] Add with a loving, dutiful mind, "Lord, think no scorn of me."[3] The Spirit of Truth will teach you inwardly all that Jesus Christ teaches you outwardly in the Gospel.[4] This is no

[1] 1 Sam. iii. 10.
[2] Ps. lxxxv. 8.
[3] Ps. xxviii. 1.
[4] John xiv. 26.

extraordinary inspiration in which you need fear delusion; it will only inspire you with the virtues suited to your condition and the ways of dying to yourself that you may live to God. It is an inward voice, which teaches us as we have need from time to time.

God is the True Friend Who always gives us the counsel and comfort we need. Our danger lies in resisting Him; so it is essential that we get a habit of hearkening to His Voice, of keeping silence within, and listening so as to lose nothing of what He says to us. We know well enough how to keep outward silence and to hush our spoken words; but we know little of interior silence. It lies in hushing our idle, restless, wandering imagination, in quieting the promptings of our worldly minds, and in suppressing the crowd of unprofitable thoughts which excite and disturb the soul. In prayer we should confine ourselves to simple affections and few points, on which it is better to dwell rather with love than argumentatively. Head-work tires, disgusts, exhausts us; but acquiescence of mind and union of the heart do not weary us in the same way. The spirit of faith and love never stanches so long as we do not forsake the Source.

But, you will say, I am not master over my own imagination, which wanders, gets excited, and disturbs me; my mind becomes distracted, and carries me away in spite of myself to ever so many dangerous, or at best unprofitable, subjects. I am accustomed to argue; my mental inquisitiveness predominates. I get worried directly that I try to resist it; this worry in itself is no less a distraction than the things which excite my curiosity. During

all this my meditation slips away, and I spend the whole time in being conscious that I am not making way.

I answer that it is with the heart that we pray, and that a sincere and persevering will to pray is true prayer. Really involuntary distractions do not hinder the will from reaching forth to God. There is still always a certain element of prayer which the schoolmen call *virtual intention*. Every time one discovers one's distraction it is put aside and we return to God, resuming the subject of meditation; so that, beyond the original element of prayer, which exists even in seasons of distraction like fire hidden beneath ashes, a half unconscious search after God, one further excites in one's self, directly on perceiving the distraction, lively and clear affections on the truths which recur to one. So the time is not lost. If you will try it patiently, you will find that there are seasons of prayer which, though spent amid distractions and tediousness, are yet, owing to a good intention, fruitful to the heart, strengthening it against all temptation.

Dry prayer, provided it be perseveringly and faithfully kept up, accustoms the soul to carry its cross, hardens it against itself, humbles it, and practises it in the dark paths of faith. If we always enjoyed a bright, fervent, sensibly attractive prayer, we should feed all our lives on milk, instead of eating hard, dry bread; we should only look for sensible enjoyment instead of abnegation and death; we should be like those of whom Jesus Christ said reproachfully that they followed Him, not for His doctrine, but for the loaves which He

multiplied. So do not be discouraged though your prayer seems to you dry, lifeless, and hindered by distractions. Be patient, then, in prayer, for God's Sake, and go on without stopping; you will be sure to make great way. But do not struggle directly with your distractions; the very struggle itself becomes a worse distraction. The best way is to let them drop, and quietly replace yourself mentally before God. The more agitated you get, the more you will excite your imagination, which will harass you persistently. On the contrary, the quieter you are, merely turning back to the subject of your meditation, the more you will attain to that inward occupation with heavenly things which is your aim. You might spend your whole time fighting the gnats which hum about you; let them buzz in your ears, but meanwhile accustom yourself to go on with your work as though they did not exist.

As to the subject of your meditations, take such passages of the Gospel or of the Imitation of Jesus Christ as move you most. Read slowly, and when a passage touches you, use it as you would a sweetmeat, which you hold in your mouth till it melts. Let the meaning sink slowly into your heart, and do not pass on to something else until you feel that to be exhausted. Thus you will spend a full quarter of an hour in meditation almost unconsciously; and if you manage your time so as to do this twice in the day, it will give you half an hour of meditation. You will do it easily if you do not try to do too much, or seek too much to see results. Trust God simply, like a child, in telling Him whatever comes into your mind. The thing is to open your heart

to God, to make it familiar with Him, to strengthen it with love. Carefully fostered love enlightens, amends, corrects, encourages.

As to your occupations, they should be divided between duty and amusement. I count all attentions paid to your generals and chief officers to whom they are due among duties; those should be performed during the hours reserved for society. Beyond these you must have some private intercourse with a small number of real friends who feel with and serve God with you, or at all events do not lead you from Him. They should be suitable to you in position and worth. Besides religious reading, you should read history, and other books calculated to cultivate your mind, whether on military or other topics in which you are interested. I should say that one of your principal occupations ought to be to see all the workings of the army, and discuss them with clever and experienced men. You should seek out such, and treat them with deference, with a view to your own improvement. As to mere idle reading, which does not strengthen the mind, I should retrench it directly that you find it excites you. A wise man gives up wine if it intoxicates him. At most, I should only indulge in such amusement, which is unduly honoured with the name of study, as one might play a game of chess after dinner. The main thing is to nurture the spark of grace in your heart. Put aside whatever can extinguish it; seek all that will fan it. Be vigorous in your efforts. "The kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force."[1]

[1] Matt. xi. 12.

Dwell upon the Mercy of God, and His Patience towards you. "Knowest thou not that the Goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance?"[1] There is no day that I do not pray for you. God knows how devoted I am to you for life.

## LXXXIX.

### To the Duc de Chevreuse. On Distractions in Prayer.

An affectionate father is not always thinking about his son: a thousand things occupy his imagination, and thereby his mind. But such distractions never hinder His paternal affection. Whenever the thought of his child recurs, it is with conscious love, and he knows he has never ceased to love that child for a moment, though he has ceased to think of him. This is what our love for our Heavenly Father ought to be—simple, and without mistrust or anxiety. If the imagination wanders, and the mind is led away, we should not be troubled. All this is not the real man, that "hidden man" of whom S. Peter speaks, whose strength lies in the "incorruptibility of a meek and quiet spirit."[2] Our business is to use our freedom of thought rightly, always turning back to the Presence of the Beloved, and not fidget about our wanderings. When God pleases, He will increase our conscious facility in maintaining a recollection of His Presence. He often deprives us of it for our better progress; for such facility diverts us with too many trains of thoughts, which are really

[1] Rom. ii. 4. [2] 1 Peter iii. 4.

distractions, and interrupt the straightforward, simple glance towards God, and so draw us out of the shadows of pure faith. We seek to gratify self-love in such processes, and the satisfaction of self-applause. So this sensible fervour becomes a distraction, while, on the contrary, we never pray better than when we are tempted to fancy that we are not praying at all. At such times we are afraid of praying amiss; but we ought to fear nothing save letting ourselves fall into natural cowardice, into that philosophical infidelity which always seeks to demonstrate its own operations in the faith, into a mere impatient longing to see and feel what is comfortable. There is no severer penance than such a condition of pure faith without any sensible support; whence I infer that it is very effectual, very crucifying, and free from delusion. It is a strange temptation. We seek sensible consolation impatiently, out of fear of lacking penitence. Why not let our penitence take the shape of renouncing the consolation we so eagerly seek?

Further, we must remember Jesus Christ forsaken of His Father on the Cross. He hid Himself, as the last grief to be inflicted on the Man of Sorrows. It was the consummation of His Sacrifice. Never need we so entirely to give ourselves up to God as when He seems to have forsaken us. Let us accept light and consolation when He gives it, but without cleaving to them; and when He plunges us into darkness, let us go blindly into our agony. One moment of such tribulation may do the work of hours. Willing all, accepting all; downcast, but with a stedfast will to bear whatever God sends,

however hard. And so one is really at peace beneath the pressure. Blessed be God, Who does so great things in us, notwithstanding our unworthiness!

## XC.

### To the Vidame d'Amiens.
### On the Dangers of Irresolution.

*March* 28, 1708.

It is not surprising that you are afraid of me. So long as you are not at one with yourself you are afraid of your own reason, still more of your faith, which condemns you; and just as naturally you are even more afraid of a man whom you believe to be but little indulgent to your infirmities. But I am not really so severe as you imagine. I pity you, and would fain comfort you. I would that I could bear your troubles, and set you free. There is nothing I would not do, save flatter you with a cruel indulgence.

You are suffering more than you would suffer by casting yourself into the Bosom of God. You would only have the same duties to perform day by day, and love would make them easy. The more you give heed to your indolence and your taste for certain pleasures, the more difficulties and hindrances you are making for yourself. Why do you defer your determination? It is irresolution and indecision of heart which depress you. If you were resolved, you would see things altogether differently, and feel what you have not yet felt. You are convinced as to what you owe to God

You have nothing to say against the claims of religion, save your adhesion to certain pleasures and your lukewarmness for virtue. "If I say the truth, why do ye not believe Me?"[1] Since our Lord has told you what is necessary to your salvation, why do you hesitate? Why not surrender yourself to His Grace and Love? Woe to the double heart!

Oh, if you had but once tasted the blessing and freedom which there is in having a will at one with God's, you would mourn over every lost moment! It is a sufficient affliction to have the flesh lusting against the spirit, but at all events the spirit should not be divided; a man should be at one with himself in desiring only that which God wills. For want of such unity we know no peace, but carry about a civil war! You can only put an end to your irresolution by prayer. Reason little, but pray much, and to that end pray simply. When you were with the army, I wrote to you as to the practice of prayer. You cannot use too great liberty of mind in it so as to persevere. Talk to God, as to the best of friends, of all your faults, troubles, and wants. Discuss your affairs with Him, and ask His counsel on all that needs deciding. As to certain steps to be taken, without which you cannot thrive, you must be strict with yourself, and go forward without casting backward glances; you will get off easiest by so doing. Though you look upon me as a kind of bugbear, I long to embrace you as you pass this way. Love me, I pray you, as one who loves and prizes you exceedingly.

[1] John viii. 46.

## XCI.

### To the Same. A Warning.

*Sept.* 17, 1808.

. . . I PRAY daily that God would uphold you against yourself, and not suffer all His Grace, so abundantly shed in your heart, to turn to your condemnation. You know what is right; you love it. Your conscience reproaches you for what you do, and for what you leave undone. You despise that which holds you as by a charm; you are ashamed of that which you are preferring to God. You would shrink with horror from dying as you are living, in dissipation, lukewarmness, and unfaithfulness. You would break through this kind of enchantment if you would but subject yourself to a little restraint in two matters: first, giving a quarter of an hour, morning and evening, to meditation and reading, with some inward effort to find God in your heart, and recall His Presence during the events of the day; and next, shunning all that you know dissipates you, excites you, and gives you a distaste for God. You would find that only unprofitable amusements cause this dissipation, and that all pursuits which belong to your position by the order of Providence do not separate you from Him, if you would use them with moderation for His Sake. Could there be a more advantageous bargain? Be courageous: do not hesitate any longer, but give yourself to Him Who seeks you only for your own eternal happiness. You will

receive a hundred-fold even in this life for what you give up. . . .

## XCII.

### To the Same.

### Discouragement to be avoided.

*April* 4, 1709.

YOUR last letter touched me greatly. I remember you daily and fervently at the Altar. You should not be surprised to find yourself so lukewarm, so frail and easily dissipated; it is the natural result of an habitual laxity. Your passions are strong; you live in the midst of the world and the most dangerous temptations; your faith is feeble; your self-love indulges freely in all which the fear of God does not set before you as gross sin. It is a worldly life somewhat restrained by fear of God; but it is not living in the love of God instead of self-love. You cannot escape from this unstedfast state save by giving yourself freely to God, and nurturing love by free and frequent prayer. When a man will only adopt so much religion as seems to quiet his conscience and give him some degree of hope, he has but a languid spiritual existence. He is like a convalescent, who eats just enough to keep him from fainting or from acute pain, but who can barely drag along, and knows not what to do. If you ask what to do, I answer :—

I. Consider yourself as a man who has chosen his side, does not deny it, is not ashamed of Jesus Christ, though he avoids all affectation; who seeks to be confirmed in doing right without looking back.

II. You must read and pray: pray heartily. Frequent the Sacraments, and adopt a good rule of life under the advice of some man who is alike free from harshness and laxity, and is thoroughly experienced in God's Ways.

III. You must examine, especially in prayer, and directly after Communion, as to what God requires of you in respect of your passions, in guarding against self, in restraining your tastes, and cutting off pleasures which interfere with your external duties, or with a recollected life. You will see that if you give yourself up to the Spirit of Grace, He will show you what hinders you in the path by which God calls you.

IV. You must not be surprised or disheartened at your faults. You must bear patiently with yourself, without flattery, or sparing correction. Do by yourself as you would by another. Directly you perceive that you have done wrong, condemn yourself, and ask God to accept your repentance; tell your fault honestly to the minister of God who is in your confidence. Begin again, as if for the first time, and do not grow weary of making continual fresh beginnings. Nothing reaches God's Heart better than such humble, patient courage.

We must not be disheartened because we experience many temptations and commit many faults. God's strength is "made perfect in weakness," S. Paul tells us.[1] It is less through sensible attraction and spiritual consolation, than by interior humiliation and frequent recourse to God, that we draw near to Him. I intreat you to think of all this. . . .

[1] 2 Cor. xii. 9.

## XCIII.

### To the Same.

### Earnestness in Welldoing.

*Dec. 19, 1709.*

I THANK God for the grace with which He fills you, but I fear lest your exertions should not be proportionate to so much help. Nothing is more to be dreaded than despised grace, and the severest judgment will follow mercies which have not brought forth fruit. It is the sin of ingratitude and resisting the Holy Spirit. God has preserved you through this year seemingly to draw you to love Him by so many secret inspirations. But as the next campaign draws near, I cannot help fearing for you. In God's Name do not let this winter, which perhaps is granted as the crisis of your eternal salvation, be spent in luxury, frivolity, and pleasure!

You have parents who serve God heartily; you have a wife, who if not yet really religious, has plenty of good sense, kindness, virtue, and respect for true religion. Are you not fortunate from without, while God continually draws you within? He is not repulsed by your negligence, but deigns to show you the patience which you ought to show Him. I am afraid this patience of God is spoiling you! Do not be content with avoiding gross sin. Pray; unite your heart to God; accustom yourself to go apart with Him in loving confidence; do everything in His Presence, and put aside whatever

is unworthy to be offered to Him. This should be your standard in all matters of conscience.

Read some good book, and use it for simple, heartfelt meditation, applying what you read to yourself. Frequent the Sacraments. Do not regulate your Communions by your life, but your life by your frequent Communions. And then, be cheerful, kindly, indulgent to the faults of others, and diligent in correcting your own, without self-flattery, or impatience in a labour which must begin afresh daily. Do credit to religion by showing that it may be made attractive in any state of life. Attend to your business rather than to the clocks. The first machine which concerns you is your home, and your own financial prosperity. Consider your creditors, who must not run a risk of ruin if you were to fail them, or be kept unduly waiting. Such delays are almost as dishonest as refusing payment.

Do not let yourself go with the fashion of a passing world. You will pass away with it. A little while, and all we see will be gone for ever. Oh, how I long to see your wife's heart drawn to God! She would help you; you would support one another. . . . Ask her to try at least to go apart with God every morning and evening for half a quarter of an hour. It is not too much to do for eternal life. One only need to go to God as to a friend one loves, without restraint. She is good, sincere, free from vanity and love of the world. Why should she not be wholly God's? May you both be His, dear Vidame!

## XCIV.

### To the Same. Ambition.

*Feb.* 23, 1710.

WHAT can I say, dear friend, but that, while you are a thoroughly worthy man as regards the world, you are no better than an ungrateful wretch towards God? Would you heap benefits and kindness on a friend who was as careless and flighty to you as you are to Him? In spite of so many things to scold you for, I love you dearly; but I do not want you to wear out God's Patience, and intreat you to diminish your love of pleasure and your idle curiosity, not your religious duties. What would you sacrifice to God, if you have not courage to give up such superfluities? It is like refusing Him the parings of your nails and the tips of your hair! As to your advancement at Court, I will only ask two things: first, that you never do anything unjust, or mean, or deceitful, to promote it, but that you be content to ask for promotion in due turn, with modest dignity; and secondly, that you should only wish for this lawful promotion after a reasonable, quiet fashion, with entire submission to Providence. Ambition does not carry its mark of disgrace upon it like many openly shameful sins. It springs up insensibly, takes root, spreads its branches under plausible pretexts, and we only begin to be conscious of it after the heart is poisoned. Mistrust it; it kindles jealousies, leads to avarice in the most disinterested, spoils the finest characters, and extinguishes the spirit of grace.

Just contemplate an eager courtier, and tremble lest you grow like him! Watch and pray, lest you enter into temptation. The man commonly called a promising courtier, who is alive to his own interests, is an odious thing. Deserve everything, ask reservedly, desire little. But, on the other hand, do not go out of mere lack of ambition and bury yourself in a workshop regulating clocks, instead of serving God and His world.

Good evening. Can you forgive me for saying all this? I love you too well to say less, even if it makes you pout! A thousand regards to Madame la Vidame. I pray heartily for her, but do not tell her so; she might do as a friend did once, who begged me not to pray for him, for fear he might be converted before he wished it himself. She is good and generous; she must be won by degrees, through confidence and example, without pressure.

## XCV.

### To the Same.
### Yielding to God's Call.

*March* 25, 1711.

I DO not doubt but that the warnings you believe you have felt in your heart for the last ten years come from God, and are very precious gifts. The more we approach God, the more He takes possession of us, to warn, reprove, and correct us. And indeed, all progress in the interior life depends upon our faithful correspondence with these dealings of the Spirit of Grace. The more God gives, the

more He requires: it is but just. We are uneasy directly that we refuse Him anything, and it is in real mercy that God makes us feel this uneasiness when we fail towards Him; it is a loving reproach of the Beloved to our soul. All inward drawing would be false and delusive if it inspired aught save evangelic virtues, or if we fancied our lights other than those of the Faith; but when that inward drawing does not flatter self-love, or lead us into any indiscreet singularity, but only excites us to mortification of passion and taste, and binds us closer to duty, then it is assuredly the leading of grace and conscience. And conscience becomes more sensitive, and more jealous for God as opposed to self, in proportion as we heed Him, and His Love grows in us. The great thing is to yield to this leading. "To obey is better than sacrifice," Holy Scripture says.[1] On the other hand, to resist God's Holy Spirit is the one sin not to be forgiven in this world or the next. Do not you resist.

Accustom yourself to have familiar recourse to God, and to ask His Help, whenever He requires some sacrifice which you have not courage to make. Your sensitiveness as to the smallest trifles shows how much you need that God should tear them from you. Oh, how blessed it is when one can make great sacrifices to God by offering up what is as mere child's play! We need not take to sackcloth and hair shirts, or fly to the desert; we need only let God deprive us of some childish trifles. Without overstepping the limits of ordinary life, or adding a cross to our daily life, we can die to self, and offer

[1] 1 Sam. xv. 22.

an inexhaustible sacrifice to God. If we have faithlessly refused something He asked, it needs but to relax our grasp the moment we are conscious of the fault. But to obtain such faithfulness we must watch, pray, strengthen our heart, not our curiosity, or vanity, or sloth. You are young, and in the midst of the world, but in time of war there is but a spider's web between you and death.[1] God calls you, He would have you entirely His Own. What are you, that you should judge for yourself? Make haste to do His Will, at the willing cost of all your own self-chosen plans. Do you propose to spend the summer with the army, or to stay at Chaulnes? I long to see you and your wife, but we must wait, and not make plans so far ahead.

## XCVI.

### To the Duc de Chaulnes.[2] On Distractions.

*Jan.* 4, 1712.

I AM noways surprised that worldly dissipation and the love of pleasure deaden your heart to your religious duties; but this experience should teach you how often things which one supposes to be innocent become practical dangers. A man gives himself up to literary investigation, to the amusements of friendly society, to the comforts of an easy, independent life, and asks, "What harm in all this? Am I not keeping within the limits of what is suit-

[1] 1 Sam. xx. 3.

[2] The Vidame d'Amiens was made Duc de Chaulnes in 1711.

able to my position? Is it not enough if I pray regularly, if I read some good book daily, and frequent the Sacraments?" Yes, certainly, all this would be enough if it were well done, but your luxurious, dissipated life prevents it being well done. In order to that, all your daily occupations should feel the effects of your religious exercises, and be animated by the spirit they should kindle: whereas, on the contrary, it is your seasons of prayer and reading which are affected by the indolence and dissipation which predominate in your exterior life. People carry to their prayers an imagination excited by all manner of idle frivolities, a mind buoyed up with thoughts and projects of self-pleasing, and a will divided between duty to God and inclination to all that fosters self-love. Can you wonder that their prayer so easily becomes a mere helpless distraction, all lifeless, an uninteresting form, which they are impatient to have done with? That which ought to be their support in all temptation is itself without strength or power: that which ought to be the heart's food is itself unfed the source of life is dried up. What remedy can we find for this? I know but two; one to lessen the day's distractions, the other to increase recollection in those hours which are free.

I do not want you to cut off anything from your public duties; indeed, I have sometimes fancied that you did not give time enough to visits of courtesy, and the claims of society arising out of your position. But you ought to cut to the quick as regards your free hours. Less of mere indulged curiosity, fewer lengthy documents, fewer details,

less of the anatomy of business. You should often cut things short with two decided words, and learn the great art of letting others help you. You dissipate your mind more in your own study with disagreeable matters than you would do by performing social duties which interfere with your notions of freedom. It is excitement[1] which shakes up self-love and causes distraction. Take away men's excitability and their roused self-love, and no occupations in the way of duty would distract them; all would be quietly done as in God's Presence, all their exterior duties would become a kind of prayer. They would be like the hermits of olden time, who kept up an almost continuous prayer together with manual labour.

As to seasons of prayer and reading, I would not have you increase them at present, you have too much external occupation; but I would have you combine with these systematic devotions a frequent act of recollection, wherein you would see God wherever you are—driving in your carriage, or what not. As to mortifications, be content with keeping to a strict *régime* and patient endurance of your malady. This is all I can say in this hasty note.

## XCVII.

### To the Marquis de Fénelon, when on Service.

*Nov.* 4, 1712.

TRY to avoid laxity and dissipation; keep certain hours strictly for your soul's nourishment. Unite

[1] "La passion."

yourself to God as you promised to do; moderate all those impulses which you know to be too keen. One cannot always repress a first unforeseen outbreak, but it is all-important to repress the second, failing which the third will be far more vehement; and a passion which might have been nipped at the birth grows so strong that it overpowers one. You must watch against vanity in your faults; one is apt to persist in them from a false shame in confessing and correcting them.

## XCVIII.

### To the Same. On Patience.

*May* 21, 1713.

I OFTEN apply to you S. Paul's words: "Let us run with patience the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the Author and Finisher of our faith; Who for the joy that was set before Him endured the Cross, despising the shame."[1] The world cannot understand that patience can be a road to our true aim; it persists in imagining patience to be mere inaction. Moreover, the world does not understand that our aim is a struggle. Men seek to attain a rest crowned with glory and delight. Nevertheless it is true that a struggle patiently borne up to the end of life is the greatest of blessings, according to our belief. Nor can we hope for this blessing, save by a perpetual looking to Jesus, the Author and Finisher of our faith. Like Him, we must choose the cross rather than the

[1] Heb. xii. 1, 2.

poisonous pleasures of the world, and despise the contempt of libertines. Why should we be less cheerful than irreligious men, we who have nothing hard to perform save what is done in a spirit of love and with the hope of an eternal kingdom, whereas they have everything to fear and nothing to hope? Let our joy be in the Lord!

## XCIX.

### To a Gentleman. On Direction.

I AM very sorry to hear of the distress your sister is in. I have often seen, and do see daily, people consumed by scruples. It is a kind of interior martyrdom, and becomes almost a despairing insanity, though it springs from reason and goodness. The only remedy for such troubles is docility. One should be cautious as to whom one trusts, but one must trust somebody, and obey without allowing one's self to argue. What can the holiest and most enlightened director do to cure you if you do not tell him everything, and will not do as he bids you? It is true that when people get into the state of distress which scruples cause, they are tempted to believe that nobody can understand them, and that the most experienced guides advise them ill for want of such understanding; but this is merely the delusion of a warped imagination, which, if yielded to, ends in incurable self-will. Ought any one to appoint himself the judge of his own course in a state of temptation or of distress in which he has but a divided use of his own reason? Is not

that the time, of all others, when one needs double submission to one's director and mistrust of self? Ought we not to believe that God does not forsake us under such hard trials, and that He will enlighten the director, through whom we are but seeking Him, so that he should advise us according to our urgent need? S. Paul tells us that God does not permit us to be tempted above that which we are able to bear; but it is to simple, obedient hearts that He promises He will stretch out His right Hand to uphold them. It is mistrusting God, ignoring His Goodness, to doubt but that He will endow a good director with whatever we need to save us from shipwreck amid the storm. I grant that during the height of trouble one must tolerate some impatience and caprice, some contradictory words or acts; but the will should be stedfast beneath, and a sincere resolution to be persistently docile must be maintained. As to all else, it depends upon details of which I am ignorant. But whatever remedies your sister seeks, whatever change she tries, she must have a director who is not to be changed. Changing one's director is practically to make one's self one's own director. Such varied direction ceases to be any at all; it is mere indocility seeking self-indulgence to the top of its bent. The hardest of all penances is humiliation of the inner mind; it implies a ceasing to bear and believe in self; it implies a meek submission to God's minister; it is that poverty of spirit which, according to Jesus Christ, makes a man blessed. Without it one can turn even mortification into food for self-love. Try to help your sister to be stedfast, to

submit her intellect, trusting in God's Goodness, and to obey with a simple heart. This will bring true peace.

C.

## To a Gentleman.

### How to give up Earthly Help at God's Call.

GOD only gives His Spirit to those who ask it in meekness and lowliness. Humble yourself, soften your heart. Be as a good little child who lets himself be carried about, and does not even ask where he is being taken. As to myself, I cannot have the honour of seeing you any more; but you have no need of me if you can but have the courage not to choose for yourself, but give yourself up to those who bear rule over you. There was once a hermit who laid aside his one book, the Gospels, and said, "I have detached myself from everything, even the book which taught me detachment." What is the use of the renunciation you have so long cherished? Is it not a delusion if you do not practise it when occasions offer for its exercise? I am not to be compared with the Holy Gospels, which contain the words of eternal life; but were I an angel from Heaven instead of a poor unworthy priest, you should think of me only by remembering anything good I may have said.

I have always taught you unreserved self-renunciation and childlike docility, detachment from myself as from all else, with unhesitating yielding to the guidance of your superiors. When the time comes that God takes away certain helps from

us, you may be sure that they are no longer helps; they only become snares. So far from being links which bind us to God, they become an earthly medium between God and one's self, which hinders one, and prevents closer union with Him.

## CI.

### To a Gentleman. On Self-Love.

I AM really glad to know that you can open your heart so freely to me; I will always speak to you with like frankness. But you must not cling to a secret resting in me. God is jealous of all we lean upon; most of all to any indirect seeking after that which we are afraid to seek openly. One should trust to nothing, not even to one's own detachment, which may insensibly become a snare. Forget yourself, and all your troubles will disperse. People fancy that the love of God is a martyrdom, but on the contrary all our troubles spring only from self-love. It is self-love which doubts, hesitates, resists, suffers, reckons up its sufferings, is uncertain, and hinders the real peace which they enjoy who are set free from self. Enough: I am sure you wish me to speak as I feel, without any reserve.

## CII.

### Patience with the Infirmities of Others.

I AM very sorry for all the disappointment you have met with. One must accustom one's self to look for little from men; it is the only way to avoid disappointment. One must take that which they

are able to give, as we take from a tree the fruit it bears, though indeed some trees bear nothing but leaves and caterpillars. God bears with and waits patiently for imperfect men, and is not even repulsed by their resistance; we ought to imitate this loving patience, this merciful forbearance. It is only imperfection which is intolerant of what is imperfect; the more any one has advanced towards perfection, the more patiently and quietly he will bear with, though not foster, the imperfection of others. Let those alone who make a tribunal out of their own prejudices; if anything can cure them, it is to let them go their own way, while we go ours with child-like simplicity and lowliness.

Do not hurry N . . . We must only ask for that which God gives. When he is reserved, wait patiently; when he expands, one word will do more than thirty unseasonably spoken. There is no good in sowing or tilling when the ground is hard with frost. If you urge N . . . , you will discourage him. He will shrink from seeing you, and imagine that you are prompted by your desire to rule him. When it pleases God to give a better opening, be ever on the watch to follow the slightest sign, but never forestall it. That is the work of faith, the patience of saints. It is a work carried on within the workman at the same time as without upon his neighbours; for he who labours is continually dying to self while he labours to carry out God's Will in others.

## CIII.

### How to bear the Absence of Fervour in Devotion.

I AM not surprised at your coldness. One is not always fervent. God does not permit our fervour to be continual; for it is well that we should be made to feel, by its ebbs and flows, that fervour is a gift of God, which He gives and takes away as He pleases. If we were always fervent, we should not feel either our cross or our weakness, and temptation would cease to be really such. We need to be tried by the inward rebellion of our corrupt nature, and to have our love purified by weariness. We never hold so fast to God as when sensible satisfaction has no share in the grasp, but our faith hangs simply on the cross. External trials would be nothing if we were free from interior trials. Bear, then, patiently with your weariness, and it will be more to your soul's profit than a lively devotion combined with self-confidence. Weariness in devotion, endured with a stedfast will, is an excellent penance. It humbles one, makes one mistrust self, realise one's own frailty, and have more frequent recourse to God. Surely these are great gain. Such an involuntary coldness, and tendency to seek whatever gratifies self-love, ought not to hinder you from communicating.

You want to hunt after a sensible satisfaction in God which is neither love nor prayer. Accept such satisfaction when God gives it you; and when He denies it, love Him, and try to pray as though it were not lacking. Those who wait for God do

really possess Him while so doing. You are quite right not to ask more satisfaction and comfort than He sees fit to give you. If He purposes to sanctify you through privation of sensible satisfaction, your part is to conform to His merciful plans, and endure dryness ; it will help to make you humble and self-denying, and that is God's work.

Your troubles are all your own making ; you rouse them by giving heed to self. Instead of bearing your cross patiently, and fulfilling your duty by helping to bear that of your neighbour, and of those God has intrusted to you, you shrink within yourself, and dwell solely on your own discouragement. Hope in God ; He will sustain you, and make you to be useful to your neighbour, provided you do not doubt that He will help you, or spare yourself.

Beware of interrupting your prayer ; you would greatly damage yourself. The silence of which you speak is excellent when you are drawn to it. Quit it for more active truths when you find so doing easy and attractive ; but do not fear such silence when it results in a more faithful waiting upon God through the day. Be as free in your action with God as possible, so long as your will is united to Him, and so long as you strive to do His Will in all things at the cost of your own.

## CIV.

### On Meditation.

I THINK you may rest satisfied as to your meditation. It seems to me all right, and that you only

need to go on with it, trusting in Him Who prompts it, and in Whose Presence you are. As to what you call *instinct*, it is a hidden germ of that Presence, and of love which must be carefully fostered, inasmuch as it feeds everything else within you. The way to cultivate this instinct is most simple, consisting of: *1st*, Avoiding all such distractions as may weaken it; *2nd*, returning at once to silence and recollection whenever you perceive that you have been distracted: *3rd*, yielding to this instinct, and making all such sacrifices as it may require of you in a true spirit of self-renunciation.

You must not suppose that God's Presence is an unreality unless it kindles great light, and excites us to great words. That Presence is never more real or more merciful than when it teaches us to be silent, to humble ourselves, not to give heed to self-conceit, but to abide stedfastly in our own obscurity and insignificance. Such self-renunciation is far more profitable than the most dazzling visions or exciting imaginations.

As to having a less conscious sense of God's Presence than formerly, this does not depend upon you. God gives and takes it away as He pleases; enough that you do not yield to any voluntary distraction. There are amusements involving passion and vanity, which dissipate the soul, and raise a barrier between God and our souls; and there are others, only entered upon with simplicity and according to the order of God's Providence, for recreation and refreshment, while the heart remains stedfast to its secret moorings. Such diversions as

these may well be used at suitable seasons, and may become a kind of semi-meditation, almost as profitable sometimes as a formal meditation.

## CV.

### On Meditation.

Do not be troubled because you have so much repose in meditation. When it is sent, accept it without scruple; it would be resisting God to reject such a leading of grace under the pretext of humility, and a desire to dwell upon your own weakness. The impression of that is sure to come back ere long; but when you feel an inclination and power to dwell peacefully in God's Presence, nothing can be so desirable as so to abide. You confess that save for this repose you do not know what meditation means. Beware, then, of voluntarily forsaking an attitude without which you say that your prayer becomes idle.

On the other hand, do not fancy that all is lost when you are without a certain amount of sweetness in prayer. God deprives you of it so as to wean you like a child, and use you to dry bread instead of milk. The child has to be weaned, and it cries; but it is kinder to let it cry and wean it, so that it may be duly nourished and strengthened. The loss of such sensible sweetness does not invalidate prayer; on the contrary, it purifies it. It is to have God without God, as you said yesterday; that is to say, God only without His Gifts, which make His Presence so sweet and comforting. It is to have a

hidden God, yet nevertheless it is Himself indeed; God testing our love, not indulging our likings and weakness. One needs to bear the alternations of these two conditions, so as neither to cleave to the one nor be disheartened by the other, to sit loosely to one and to be stedfast under the other, to be indifferent to both, and not one's self to change as they change. We have to remember that we cannot get the consolations for ourselves: God only gives them when and as He sees fit. We must let them go, and offer up God's Own Gifts when He withdraws them, as a loving wife might readily forego her jewels, and even her husband's caresses, out of conformity to his wishes. It is a higher thing to cleave to God when He tries, despoils, abases us, than to do so when He lavishes sweetness and indulgence on us. Never mind your faults; it will suffice if you feel them when God's light points them out, and if you do not spare yourself in correcting them. Your temptations will turn to your gain. True union with God lessens our imperfections. Abide with Him, and bear calmly whatever trial He sends you.

## CVI.

### Living to Christ.

. . . YOUR health is very precious to me, and your faithfulness to God is dearer still. It is not a question of the pleasure or the reward to be found in serving Him. Such conscious satisfaction does not even always depend upon the excellence of our

service ; and while we must never bring privation upon ourselves by any voluntary carelessness or distraction, we must be ready to forego all this comfortable sense of well-doing, and abide patiently in darkness and disappointment when God surrounds us with them. Sometimes, even, it is great gain to a stedfast soul to realise all its poverty and helplessness. It matters much more that we feel our own weakness, and fly to God, than that we enjoy a satisfaction which may tempt us to self-confidence.

O my dear child, the whole Christian life consists in dying to self and living to God ! For this we need to die continually to all the secret, subtle lines of self-conceit ; we need to watch jealously against self-love as opposed to the love of God, perpetually to force natural tendencies out of their groove, and reduce them to His Will. This is the real antidote to self-deception in the spiritual life. People are led astray under specious pretexts of perfection chiefly by seeking to please themselves rather than to satisfy God, and by attempting to adapt religion to their fancies rather than to subject every liking and taste to the Cross of Jesus Christ. That is a false and saddened life which resists God ; but he who dies to self will enjoy a true and happy life. Such a blessed death it is to lead a "life hid with Christ in God," while all worldly happiness is merely deceitful, and leads to real death. O dear child, may we so die to all, that Christ alone may live in us !

## CVII.

### How to bear Crosses.

YOU have to carry many a cross, but you need them, since God lays them on you. He knows how to select them; it is the fact of their being His selection which disturbs and roots out self-will. Crosses which you picked out and thought well to bear, so far from being crosses and means of death unto self, would be all that was wanted to sustain and strengthen self-will. You complain of your interior darkness and poverty: "Blessed are the poor in spirit." "Blessed are they who, not having seen, yet have believed." Is it not far enough for us to see if we can perceive our own frailty, and not attempt to palliate it? If we see our own darkness, it will do! There is then no light whereby to indulge a curious disposition, but as much as is needed for mistrusting self, setting self aside, and yielding to others. What would that goodness be worth of which a man was always inwardly conscious, and with which he was satisfied—a mere visible light? I thank our Lord that He deprives you of so dangerous a stay. Go, like Abraham, "not knowing whither;" follow the leadings of lowliness, simplicity, and self-denial, and you will acquire peace, recollection, gentleness, detachment, forbearance towards others, and contentment under all your troubles.

## CVIII.

### Laying aside Worldly Things.

. . . How dear you both will become to me if what we talked of should really come to pass ! . . . Yes, dear fellow, no more ambition, or worldly curiosity, or mere earthly policy ! The exterior life as simple, lowly, and straightforward as the interior. "If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit."[1]

Be wise, but with the wisdom of God, not of the world. It is a poor security which springs from mere worldly prudence ! Let go all impetuosity, all activity, all dissipation ; you greatly need it. Even if not practising systematic recollection, try in simple faith to drop whatever disturbs and distracts you, all that excites your imagination, kindles your natural desires, and upsets interior peace and stillness. People talk grandly about mental passivity while they are in a state of perpetual activity ; they want assurance, extraordinary lights, even forecasts of the future, in order to rest quietly in the shadows of simple faith. It is like wanting sunshine at midnight !

Be very humble, very simple ; let there be neither Cephas nor Apollos, but only the Child Jesus binding us all together in the bonds of His holy childhood. Advent is coming ; let us be born anew with Him.

[1] Gal. v. 25.

## CIX.

### The Inward Cross.

BEAR your inward cross patiently. Outward crosses would be none without this, but rather lead to a continual triumphal sense of our own invincibility. Such crosses damage the soul, and foster self-conceit. Suffering, to be profitable, must be borne in conscious weakness and helplessness, hanging on the Cross with Jesus Christ, and saying with Him, "My God, why hast Thou forsaken me?" Such crushing of self-will is very precious in His Sight Who is working in us. Dwell upon those most instructive words of S. Augustine, "Nihil in me relinquatur mihi, nec quo respiciam ad me ipsum." Do not heed your imagination, or the cogitations of worldly wisdom; let all go, and abide in the Hands of our Dear Lord. His Will and Glory are enough for us.

## CX.

### The Same.

. . . BE as simple and lowly amid the most censorious world as in your own study. Do not act from worldly wisdom or natural inclination, but merely as yielding to the spirit of life and death—death to self, life to God. No enthusiasm, no seeking conscious assurance, no trusting to the future, as though the present, however hard, were not enough for those who have no treasure save God's Will, or

as though you sought to compensate self for present sadness by dwelling on a possibly prosperous future. They deserve disappointment who seek such hollow consolation. Accept all in humility; lay aside all self-interested aims, however disguised. Leave all to God, and think of nothing but how to die to self in the present moment, as though it were your whole eternity. Do not plan or manœuvre.

## CXI.

### How to receive Admonition.

I GREATLY wish that you could receive what is said with a view to your inward correction in a frank, hearty spirit. . . . You need a check to the continual sallies of your too lively imagination. Everything diverts and distracts you, and fosters your natural levity.

You follow your own fancy too much. You have too much to say about useless matters, and even about the unimportant details of necessary ones. You are too much concerned to win consideration, confidence, distinction; you think too much of your rank, and of persons who do you honour. You give too much time to whatever pleases and flatters you. You can only get free from all this by stopping short.

You ought to know the men with whom you want to live familiarly very well, and be clear as to their views and opinions. . . . Be careful not only to receive admonitions or contradictions without pride or self-conceit, but beware of neglecting them

through carelessness or distraction. A good counsel is wasted if it is speedily forgotten. To be well used, time should be given for such counsel to sink into the inner mind, and you should endeavour quietly to apply it to every detail which it affects. . . .

## CXII.

### Real Rest.

N . . . will never know any real rest until she leaves off trying to secure it. This life's peace is only to be found in uncertainty. Pure love only finds scope in the absence of all assurance. Every anxious glance is a drawing back, and a failure in true self-abandonment. Let us leave God to do what He will with us, and when that is done, be content to lean on nothing earthly.

Your sister must give herself up into God's Hands. "Whether we live, we live unto Him, or whether we die, we die unto Him," says S. Paul. Giving up self is only real when there is something to give up. God is the Same for the next life as for this, equally worthy to be served for His Glory and His Good Pleasure. In either case He requires our all, and His Jealousy hedges in the souls who seek Him on all sides. Paradise, hell, and purgatory have a kind of beginning even in this life.

I pray for the peace of pure faith and self-abnegation for your dear sister. Such peace is not easily lost or invaded, because it is not built upon any private possession or support. I would fain see her heart full of peace and simplicity. I say this,

because simplicity is the true source of peace. Those who are not simple are not true children of peace, and do not taste its fruits. People often deserve the anxiety they feel by their useless self-contemplation in spite of knowing it to be harmful. The spirit of peace only rests upon those who do not disturb it by giving ear to self rather than to God. Rest, which is a foretaste of the Eternal Sabbath, is very sweet, but the road which leads to it is a thorny path. It is time (this is meant for your sister) to let God complete His work of years. He requires more of her than of a beginner.

I pray with all my heart for your invalid; her cross is precious in God's Sight. The more she suffers, the more I reverence her in Him Who crucifies her that she may be made worthy of Him. Great suffering sets forth at once the depth of the wound we have to heal, and the greatness of the gifts prepared for us by God.

For yourself, sir, shun dissipation; beware of your own impetuosity. That natural energy which you foster instead of repressing gradually withers up the grace of an interior life. A man only holds fast to rules and visible motives, while the "life which is hid with Christ in God" is affected, becomes polluted, and dies out for lack of needful sustenance, namely, silence in the soul's depths. I was sorry that you were not in active service; but I see that it is the intention of God's Mercy to detach you from the world, and draw you to the life of pure faith, which is unceasing death. So give to the world only such time as necessity and social *bienséances* require. Do not let yourself be absorbed by trifles; only talk

when it is needful. Always control your imagination; let go everything. It is not through eager anxiety that you will cease to be impetuous. I do not ask for a laborious, toilsome recollection, but one which merely consists in dropping whatever stirs and excites you.

I am rejoiced to hear that you find so much that is good in . . . I hope you will make her still better by teaching her, through your simple, stedfast example, how attractive and unlike what the world esteems it true religion is. But her husband must not spoil her by a blind passion. While spoiling her he would spoil himself too; and such excess might end in a dangerous coolness, possibly in estrangement. Let the stream flow by somewhat, but watch for providential opportunities to point him to moderation, recollection, and the preference of grace to nature. Watch for God's moments, and do not let them slip.

God would have us unite two very great acts of self-mortification in doing His work, *i.e.* to labour as though everything depended on the assiduity of our toil, and when the work is accomplished, to count it as nothing. Sometimes when we have worked hard, God sees fit to sweep away the fruits of our work as the broom sweeps away a cobweb, and then He Himself effects, we know not how, the work on which we bestowed what seems such a useless toil. Do you weave your cobwebs, God will sweep them away; and when you are dumbfoundered, He will work things out in His Own way.

## CXIII.

### Comfort under Trial.

I AM truly concerned for the sufferings of your dear invalid, and the trial of those whom God brings into such close contact with her cross. Bid her never mistrust God, and He will proportion her sufferings to the patience He will give her. He only, Who has made all hearts, and renewed them by His Grace, knows what that due proportion is. The man on whom He is exercising it does not perceive it, and knowing neither the extent of his future trial, nor that of God's upholding Grace, he is tempted to depression and despair. He is like one who has never seen the sea, and who, when caught on the rocks by a rising tide, would imagine that the advancing waves would soon swallow him up. He would not know that the tide must turn at the precise spot which God's Finger has fixed, and he would be more frightened than hurt.

God lets a good man's trial be somewhat like the ocean : it swells, and rises, and threatens, but He holds its limits in His Hand. "God is faithful, Who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able." He vouchsafes to call Himself *faithful*. How blessed is that faithfulness! Remind your invalid of this, and bid her not look beyond to-day, but leave all to God. Oftentimes that which seemed most terrible and unbearable beforehand is lightened when it comes. All that is excessive comes, not of God, Who never lays too much on us, but from our own imagination, which seeks to penetrate the future,

and our self-love, which exaggerates all we suffer. This will help . . . , who sometimes is distressed, lest she should give way to distress at some future time. All our moments are alike in God's Hand, the hour of death as that of life. With a word He controls wind and storm, and they obey Him. Why are you afraid, O man of little faith? Is not God yet more powerful than you are powerless?

## CXIV.

### The Sensitiveness of Self-conceit.

I DO not wonder that God spares you; you are too weak not to be spared. I told you that He would not honour you by treating you as hardly as you feared. It is no great matter if you do use a few old-fashioned expressions, or if two or three people remark that your language is not a perfect model of purity. Whatever tends to indiscretion, breach of confidence, charity, or edification, should never be tolerated. I need hardly say the same about common sense. If you should find yourself really in danger on such points, you had better tell me; but with regard to what merely concerns ordinary politeness, or *les bienséances*, I think you must try to cultivate a spirit of simplicity and humiliation. There is nothing you need so greatly as to mortify your thoughts, your tastes, your useless fastidiousness in all these trifles. The more you shrink from sacrifice therein, the more necessary it is proved to be. Such sensitiveness is a sign of a very lively self-will, which must be rooted out. But do not

tamper with God. You see that He does but ask that which you yourself know He must take to destroy your pride. Do not dwell upon the future; one does but lose one's self by so doing. Do not try to guess how far God will carry you if you always yield unresistingly to Him. He never deals with us in the ways we foresee; such foresight would break the blow. He rather touches us in ways we should never have expected, and of which we should have thought nothing. Very often, too, the phantoms we have raised melt away, and so all our forebodings only tend to disturb us. Obey from day to day; such obedience is our true daily bread. We, like Jesus Christ, are fed by His Father's Will, which Providence conveys to us in each present moment. This heavenly bread is like manna, it cannot be stored up; the anxious, mistrustful man who stored up for the morrow beheld it grow corrupt. Yield to all that is required of you. Be pliable and lowly, not arguing, not heeding self, ready for everything, and cleaving to nothing; ready to be high or low, praised or blamed, useful or useless, trusted, or suspected, and envied by those with whom you live. So long as you are free from pride, self-conceit, and self-will in all things, all will be well. This is a great deal to ask, but it is not too much. Keep silence as much as you are able; nourish your heart, and let your intellect fast.

No one could be more concerned than I am for your real interests, or wish more heartily to see you detached from all that is not God. May you be filled with peace, stillness, simplicity, rejoicing in God, not in the creature, and lie passive in His Hand.

## CXV.

### Indulgence for other Men's Faults.

. . . IS really a good man, though he has his faults. Who has not? Yet, overladen as we are with our own, which we leave uncorrected, we are so sensitive and impatient towards those of our neighbour! Nothing, seemingly, can make us indulgent, since our own incorrigible frailty does not abate the severity of our criticism upon others. We can often do more for other men by correcting our own faults than by trying to correct theirs. Be at rest, sir; let all these things flow by, like the river beneath a bridge. Do you abide in the Presence of God, Which will never flow away.

## CXVI.

### To One in Trial.

I HEAR that God is sending you trials, and I sympathise most heartily in them. I have ever felt keenly whatever grieved you, but now experience has taught me a fresh sympathy for others' sorrows. Blessed are they that mourn! I say it both on your behalf and my own amid the present stress; blessed, too, they that mourn with a humble, meek heart! Whatever comes of God's Good Pleasure can never be too much. If we controlled our own trials, we should never suffer enough to die truly to self. God, Who knows us better than we know ourselves, and loves us infinitely better

than we love ourselves, knows just the due proportion, and will not let us be tried beyond that which we are able to bear. Love soothes all suffering, and we only suffer so intensely either because we love not at all, or too little.

God would take sole possession of you, and it is only on the Cross that He does this thoroughly.

I maintain a general silence to all my old friends, and only break it with you now, sir, because you are in trouble, and because our companionship in the Cross draws out one's sympathy and desire to comfort a fellow-sufferer.

## CXVII.

### Advice as to ruling a Household.

A RIDER who frets his horse's mouth will soon make it a worthless brute. He raises the tone and feeling of his inferiors who always treats them with courtesy and dignity, and a kindly intention. If one is unable to give what is asked, one should at least let it be seen that one is sorry for it. Again, be careful to give each, according to his department, the necessary authority over his inferiors, as nothing will go on smoothly without a due subordination, to which, sometimes, other things must be sacrificed. When you perceive a servant's faults, guard against being at once set against him. Weigh his good and evil, and be sure that you are fortunate if you find the most essential good qualities. Think how many are worse than he is, and consider how to amend his faults, which very

likely are the result of bad training. As to the infirmities of natural temperament, do not expect to cure them; be satisfied with softening them, and then bear patiently with all such. If you persist, in spite of experience, in trying to correct a servant of some failing which is as the marrow of his bones, it will be less his fault for not being cured than yours for attempting the cure. Never tell people of several faults at once. You will profit them nothing, but discourage them greatly. Rather set their faults gradually before them, as you see that they have courage to bear the sight with advantage.

Talk to your servants; not merely to give orders, but with three other objects: 1*st*, To enter kindly into their interests; 2*nd*, to warn them quietly of their failings; and 3*rd*, to praise them for doing well. Never let them suppose that you are alive to what is ill done, but unmindful of what they do well. Encourage them with moderate but hearty praise. Whatever faults a servant may have, you are bound to treat him well so long as he remains in your service; and if he is in a position of trust, you should let others see that you speak to him considerately, otherwise you lower him in their eyes, make him powerless in his office, and put him to great and needless annoyance. If you have servants whose good sense, discretion, honesty, and affection you can trust, give heed to them, show them all the confidence they deserve; such treatment will always win the heart of disinterested people. A courteous, kindly manner has more influence than even gifts. The act of seasoning the gift we give is more important than the thing itself

Never be in debt to your servants; it is a very bondage. Far better have wealthier creditors, who can more easily wait, and are not so likely to take advantage of deferred payment. You should give wages according to a fair standard. If you give less than other well-conditioned people in your position, your servants will be always dissatisfied, think you mean, serve you without interest, and leave you at the first opportunity.

To carry out these rules you must begin with a firm conviction that they are necessary, and accept them as in God's Sight. Then forestall the occasions on which you are likely to fail; and whenever you do fail, humble yourself before God, quietly and without giving way to fretfulness, striving to acquire strength through recollection of His Presence to do what you cannot do in your own strength.

## CXVIII.

### To Nicolas de Harlai de Bonneuil. On the Death of his Son-in-Law, the Marquis de Crèvecoeur.

*Nov.* 12, 1701.

I AM deeply touched at your loss, which is also great to the public, for I know how rare it is to meet with so many noble qualities in so important a position. . . . I would I could be at hand to share your grief and endeavour to comfort you. But you know whence comes all true consolation in the loss of those who are dear to us. Religion can give no better comfort than in telling us that we have not

lost them, and that there is a home to which we are daily drawing nearer, in which we shall all meet again. So let us not sorrow as those who have no hope. I am deprived of the pleasure of seeing you, but I call to mind how fast life flows away, and I hope that ere long we shall meet for ever in God. Those who die are, in respect of us, but as absent for a few years, it may be only months. Their seeming loss should tend to loosen our hold on the world, where we must lose everything, and draw us to that other world where we shall find all again. The sincere religion which guides you, sir, makes me trust that this heavy blow will be to your gain. God never strikes but in love, nor takes away save to give again. I pray Him to comfort you, to preserve your health, and to turn your heart wholly to Himself. Blessed is he who lives in faith, trusts to none save God, and uses this world as though he were already beyond it.

## CXIX.

### The Value of Frankness.

THERE is one thing in your letter which does not please me, and that is your supposing that you need not tell me the trifles which interest you, lest I should despise or be bored with them. No indeed, I despise nothing, and I should be very despicable myself if I despised others. Every one is more or less engrossed by a number of trifles in spite of himself; virtue does not consist in being free from this tribe of futile imaginations, but faithfulness lies in not

yielding to them voluntarily, and simple truthfulness requires that they be acknowledged just as they are. It is true that such things are small in themselves; but there is nothing so great in God's Sight as a soul humbling itself to acknowledge them regardless of self-conceit. Moreover, these trifles make one understand a man's real disposition much better than greater things, which are more deliberate, or what is less purely natural. A sick man tells his physician everything; he is not satisfied with merely reporting his chief symptoms. It is by a number of petty details that he can make the doctor know his constitution thoroughly, and understand the causes of, and remedies suitable, to his disease. So do you tell me everything; and be sure that you will do no good until you are open as to everything which God's light shows you, and prompts you to confess.

I think you are right not to read Saint Teresa at present. You will never be so conformed to God's Good Pleasure as when renouncing all that is called cleverness, and when you treat your intellect as a woman who forsakes the world treats her body, despising its adornment. The ornaments of the intellect are yet more deceitful and dangerous. Read S. Francis de Sales diligently. He was above all cleverness, he would rather take it away than give it; he treats it as a malady to be cured! "Blessed are the poor in spirit;" that poverty is alike their treasure and their wisdom.

## CXX.

### Forgetfulness of Self.

EAGERNESS to help others often springs only from human generosity and a refinement of self-love, and that very same eager self-love would easily turn to vexation and despair. True charity is simple and equable as regards one's neighbour, because it is humble, and free from self-seeking. Whatever does not spring from this pure love needs the knife of circumcision.

It is the circumcision of the heart which makes us children and inheritors of Abraham's faith, ready, like him, to go from out our native home, not knowing whither. Truly it is a grand lot to leave all, and abandon one's self to the jealous Love of God, Which is the circumcising knife! Our own hand always stops short in superficial prunings. Self-love stays the hand, and spares us; it will not cut down into the very quick for itself. Moreover, there is always a choice, and an exercise of self-love in that choice, which deadens the blow. But when God's Hand is lifted, it deals unexpected blows; it knows precisely where to hit the joints so as to sunder the soul from self; it searches all things. Then self-love becomes the patient, and we must let it cry out. The great thing is not to stir beneath God's Hand, for fear of hindering His work; we must abide motionless under the knife. Bear your own weakness and God's blows patiently. . . .

I always love to dwell on S. John's forgetfulness

of himself for Jesus Christ's Sake : he pointed to Him; he was but the voice announcing Him; he sent all his disciples to Him ; and therein, with his lonely ascetic life, he was greatest among the children of men. Forget yourself, and you will be a S. John in the desert.

## CXXI.

### Resting content in the Present.

My life is dry and dull as my body, but I am in a sort of wearied-out calm—sick at heart, and unable to stir without a sort of numb pain. All sensitiveness springs from self-love ; we only suffer because we have so much will. If we wished for nothing save God's Will, we should be perpetually satisfied, and everything else would be as unpalatable as black bread offered to a man who had just made a luxurious meal. If we were contented with what is God's Will at the actual moment, we should not stretch our inquisitive longings into the future. God will do His Will ; He will not do ours, but He will do perfectly right. Let us give up to Him not merely our earthly desires, but all our longings to promote His Glory after our own fashion. Let us follow Him blindfold in a pure faith. He who wants to see begins at once to wish, argue, fear, and hope for himself and his. We should have eyes as though we had none ; in truth, they often help to deceive and disturb us. That will be a happy day to us in which we do not seek to forecast the morrow.

## CXXII.

### To One suffering from Jealousy.

I AM rejoiced at the simplicity with which you have opened your heart's trouble to me. God will bless this effort; it is of His pure Grace. These violent emotions of jealousy are involuntary; your exceeding distress proves it. If your jealousy were less in contradiction to your will, it would be far less painful to you. You are, in fact, only too strenuous in your efforts to reject it. Your struggles, which you carry to excess, are overwhelming both body and mind, and your eagerness to reject the temptation by decided acts withers you up, and hinders God's Grace, which would have you recollected and at peace. How I wish that I could only induce you to bear the temptation without consenting to it; your bodily health and your inward peace would then be restored! I believe that you give way rather too much to certain vexatious thoughts, though even then it is only an infirmity of the imagination; but as to the actual passion of jealousy, you only endure it with horror, so there is no sin in that.

Temptation and involuntary emotions should never keep you from Communion. I beseech you to communicate in the Name of Him Who will be your peace when you have received Him in pure faith and blind obedience. God knows the real injury you would do yourself in depriving your soul of its daily bread on account of an imaginary evil in which your will has no share, but which it rather

rejects with excessive eagerness and sensitiveness. I hope that the Bread of Life will heal all the sores of your heart. It is required that a man be free from mortal sin to receive it rightly, but not free from all imperfection. It is the Bread which makes what is small to wax large, which strengthens the weak and heals the sick. The sacrifice of your anxiety, and all the self-consuming of your own heart, will profit you more than all the restless, excited acts with which you are perpetually disturbing your recollectedness.

I quite believe that your suffering is extreme; but the suffering you bring upon yourself by dwelling on it is infinitely harder than that which God lays on you. All suffering borne patiently in the peace of God, let it be ever so grievous in itself, carries its own comfort; the real unlightened suffering is that in which the will resists God under one plausible pretext or another. Give up all your own notions, and learn by degrees to hush your self and listen only to God. This road, which seems to you so long, is the shortest, and indeed it is your only safe way.

## CXXIII.

### On Conversion to God.

THOSE who have lived far from God fancy that they have drawn very near to Him so soon as they have made the first steps in that direction. The most cultivated and enlightened men are just as deficient in perception herein as a peasant who should imagine himself a confirmed courtier because

he has seen the King. Men renounce gross, shocking vices, and drop down into a slothful, worldly life of distraction. They measure it, not by the Gospel, which is the only real standard, but by comparison with their own past life, or that which they see so many others actually leading. Nothing more is needed to enable a man to canonise himself, and to slumber in the deepest of sleep as to all that is yet needful for him to do in order to be saved.

Yet this condition is perhaps more fatal than one of scandalous disorder. There is some chance in that of conscience being disturbed, and of a rekindled faith stimulating a man to some great effort: whereas the drowsy state only serves to choke all wholesome remorse, to foster an unreal peace of mind, and to make spiritual maladies irretrievable by persuading the patient that he is quite well. Our salvation does not depend merely on ceasing to do evil; it is also necessary that we learn to do well. The Kingdom of Heaven is too great a prize to be given to a mere slavish fear, which abstains from evil merely because it dare not commit it. God would have children who love His Goodness, not slaves who serve Him only through fear of His Power. They who love Him will, as a natural result, do all that love prompts. Is it possible to love God heartily, and yet passionately to love that world which is His enemy, and which He has so severely condemned in His Gospel? Can a man really love God, and yet fear to know Him, lest he should be obliged to do more to please Him? Is it possible to love God, and yet be satisfied with not openly denying Him, while taking no pains to

please and glorify Him, or to bear a hearty testimony to His Love? Our Lord Jesus Christ tells us that the tree which bears no fruit will be cut down and cast into the fire as dead; and of a truth, whosoever does not bear the fruit of Divine Love is dead, and withered to the root.

Is there any earthly being, however vile, that would be content to be loved no better than we love God, and that without any shame? Men affect to love Him on condition of bestowing nought save words and forms upon Him (and even these are often hasty, because they are wearisome and distasteful); on condition never to sacrifice any eager passion, or practical interest, or indulgence affecting an easy life, to Him. They would love Him on condition that they may love all that He hates and condemns of the world's vanities as much as, or more than, Him. They pretend to love Him on condition of noways lessening that blind self-love which becomes idolatry, and which, instead of referring to God as the End for which we are made, seeks to drag Him down to its own level, using Him as a *pis-aller*, a thing to help and comfort when the creature fails. Is this really to love God? is it not rather to offend Him?

But even this is not all. Men profess to love God on condition that they may be ashamed of His Love, and hide it as a weakness; that they may blush to own Him as a Friend worthy their love; that they may rest content with certain external decencies of religion, so as to avoid open scandal; but meanwhile live at the world's mercy, not daring to give aught to God save with its permission.

This is the love, forsooth, by which they expect to deserve an eternal reward!

A man says, "I have made a careful confession of my past sins, I read a little, I hear Mass, and I pray with fair devotion, I avoid all gross sin. Beyond that I do not feel able to leave the world, or break all terms with it. Religion must be very strict if it is not satisfied with thus much. All your refinements of devotion go too far, and tend rather to dishearten one than to make religion attractive." This is the sort of thing which even seemingly well-disposed people often say. But it is easy to undeceive them if they will honestly look into the matter.

Their error springs from ignorance both of God and of themselves. They are jealous of their liberty, and fear to lose it by giving themselves up too far to religion. But they should remember that they are not their own, they are God's; and He, having made them solely for Himself, and not for themselves, has a right to lead them as He will with absolute sway. They owe themselves to Him unconditionally and unreservedly. We have, properly speaking, no right even to give ourselves to God, for we have no right over ourselves. But if we do not leave ourselves to Him, as naturally belonging to Him, we are guilty of sacrilegious larceny, overthrowing the course of nature, and violating the essential laws of His creation. It is not our part to argue upon the law God lays upon us. We are bound to receive, adore, and follow it blindly. He knows better than we do what is good for us. If we had to compose the Gospel, we might be disposed

to make it more lax, so as to suit our frailty. But God did not consult us in framing it; He gave it fully framed, and has left us no hope of salvation save by the fulfilment of this sovereign law, which is applicable to all ranks. "Heaven and earth will pass away," but this Word of Life will "never pass away." Not one word or letter can be set aside. Woe to the priests who should presume to lessen its weight, with a view to making it easier to men! They have not made this law; they are merely its depositaries. Consequently it is unjust to tax them with the severity of the Gospel. This law is as formidable to them as to other men; indeed, more so, inasmuch as they have to answer for its observance both by themselves and others. Woe to the blind who lead the blind! both—it is the Son of God Who said it—"shall fall into the ditch."[1] Woe to the ignorant, or cowardly, or flattering priest who strives to widen the narrow path! it is the broad way which leads to perdition. Let man's pride be hushed; he imagines himself free, but he is not so. He is bound to bear the yoke of the law, and to trust that God will give him strength proportionable to the weight of that yoke.

Of a truth, He Who has such sovereign power over His creature does give him power, through inward grace, to will and to do that which He commands. He makes the yoke one to be loved. He lightens it by the inner attractions of justice and truth. He casts His own glow of pure delight upon virtue, and disgusts men with vice. He upholds man against himself, tears him from his

[1] Matt. xv. 14.

own corruption, and makes him strong despite his weakness. O man of little faith, wherefore do you doubt? Leave all to God; give yourself up to Him. You must suffer, but it will be amid love, peace, and consolation. You must fight, but you will win the day, and God, Who fights with you, will Himself give you the victor's crown. You must weep, but your tears will not be bitter, and God will wipe them tenderly away. You will no longer be free to give way to your tyrannical passions, but you will voluntarily give up your freedom to enter upon a new liberty, of which the world recks not, in which you will be solely prompted by love. Further, just consider what your worldly bondage is. Have you not much to endure in order to win the praise of men whom you despise? What does it not cost you to repress impetuous feelings when they go too far, or to yield to men it behoves you to please, or to conceal your troubles, or to put up with intolerable social burdens? Is this your much-vaunted liberty, which you are so reluctant to sacrifice to God? Where is it? show it me. Turn where I will, I see nought save constraint, mean servility, a miserable necessity for disguise and deceit from morning to night. We hold back from God, Who seeks us but that He may save us; and we throw ourselves upon the world, which only wants to enthral and ruin us. People fancy that in the world they can please themselves because they take pleasure in the passions which mislead them. But they do not reckon up the endless disappointments, the mortal weariness, the mishaps, the humiliations which are certain to befall them even in the highest places.

From without all looks serene, but within vexation and anxiety is seething. Men imagine, forsooth, that they are free when subject to no law but their passions. Fatal error! Is there any condition in the world wherein we do not depend more upon other people's fancies than our own? All social intercourse is hampered by *les bienséances*, and the necessity of pleasing others. Furthermore, our passions are the harshest of all tyrants. Give way to them but a little, and we shall be in a state of ceaseless conflict, unable to breathe freely a moment. They betray and wring the heart; they trample reason and honour under foot; they never say, "It is enough." Even if you could count on perpetual victory over them, what a victory it would be! But if, on the contrary, you yield to the torrent, whither will it sweep you? I shudder at the thought; you dare not contemplate it!

O my God, save me from that fatal bondage which human presumption is not ashamed to call liberty! In Thee alone can man be free; "Thy truth shall make me free"!

It is simple blindness to fear going too far in the love of God—the farther the better; and the more we love Him, the more we shall love all He would have us do. This love comforts under loss, lightens all crosses, loosens our hold on what is dangerous, saves us from poisonous snares, and stretches forth a tender mercy which, amid whatever trials may beset us, even death itself, points us to glory and eternal happiness. This love turns every ill to good. How, then, can we fear being filled too full of it? We may reasonably fear too much worldly happi-

ness, too much freedom of self-will, the caprice of pride, the violence of passion, and the tyranny of a treacherous world; but why should we hesitate to throw ourselves with perfect confidence into the Arms of the Father of Mercies and God of Consolation? His Love will supply all that is lacking. He only will fill the heart, which the world has intoxicated, excited, disturbed, but can never satisfy. He will only teach us to despise that which we despise in our heart already. He will only take away that which afflicts us. He will but make us do ordinary deeds—simple, reasonable acts, which we now do amiss because they are not done for His Sake. He will teach us to do the same things well out of obedience to Him. Thus everything, even the commonest actions of a simple, ordinary life, will turn to our comfort, our merit, and reward. We shall see death draw near calmly; it will be transformed for us into the entrance into eternal life. So far from "unclothing" us, we shall "be clothed upon," as S. Paul says, through it. Verily, religion is the greatest of blessings!

## CXXIV.

### Humility.

THE Saints have all agreed that true humility is the groundwork of every virtue, and that because it is the offspring of pure love, and because humility is truth itself. There are but two real truths—the Almightiness of God and the nothingness of us His creatures; and if humility is real, it will make us

pay continual homage to God through our lowliness, abiding in our proper place, content to be nought. Jesus Christ bids us be meek and lowly of heart; meekness is the child of humility, as anger of pride. Jesus Christ alone can give us this His Own true humility of heart. It comes from His Grace; it does not consist, as some imagine, in external deeds of humility, however excellent these may be in their proper season, but in simply abiding where God has placed us. He who imagines himself to be something is not truly humble; neither is he who seeks anything for himself. But he who so entirely forgets himself that his thoughts do not recur to self or self-seeking; who is lowly within, never offended at anything, though not affecting outward tokens of patience; who speaks of himself as he would of another; who does not pretend to ignore himself while really bursting with self-consciousness; who gives himself up for love's sake, without considering whether to do so looks like pride or humility; who is content to be thought deficient in humility—in short, he who is full of love, such an one is truly humble. He who does not seek his own interest, but solely God's interest in time and eternity, he is humble. The purer his love, the more perfect his humility. Do not test humility by external appearances, by this or the other action, but solely by love. Pure love strips self from off a man, and clothes him with Jesus Christ, so that "it is no more I that live, but Christ that liveth in me."

Men are always seeking to be some great thing, to be conspicuous in religion as of old in things of the world, which now they have forsaken. Why?

Because they crave distinction under all circumstances. But the humble man seeks no distinction; praise or blame are alike to him. Wherever his lot is cast, therein he abides; it does not occur to him to seek for anything different. Many people study exterior humility who are a long way off this sort of heartfelt humbleness; yet exterior humility which does not flow from love is spurious. The more it stoops, the loftier it inwardly feels itself; but he who is conscious of stooping does not really feel himself to be so low that he can go no further. People who think much of their humility are very proud, and all such unreal stooping is a subtle search how to go up higher. There will be none of this sort of humility in Heaven. It must give place to simple love, which alone is worthy of God, and into which alone He deigns to pour Himself. They who are full of Him cannot consciously humble or lower themselves, for they feel beneath all possible abasement. They are not hurt or humbled by any contempt or blame of men, neither are they exalted by any praise they may receive. They believe that no one ever humbled himself below what he really is save the Word in His Incarnation; therefore Holy Scripture says of Him that He "emptied" Himself, which it says of no earthly creature.

Many men deceive themselves herein; seeking to be humble by an effort of will, and failing in perfect resignation and self-renunciation, they sin against Divine Love, without which there is no humility. Fuller light would enable them to see that they are exalting themselves by that which they mean for humility; their supposed setting

aside of self is self-seeking; they are puffed up with the pride of humility, and glory in the humble acts they perform. But the really humble man does not do anything of the sort: he lets himself be carried hither and thither; he is satisfied that God should do as He will with him, as the wind with a straw; and there is more real humility in accepting even greatness in such a spirit, than in thwarting God's plans beneath a pretext of lowliness. He who chooses abasement rather than elevation is not necessarily humble, though he may wish to be; but he who lets himself go,—up or down,—heedless whether he be praised or blamed, unmindful of what is said of him, is really humble, whatever men may think, if it be because he waits solely on God's Pleasure.

Such a man asks nothing, refuses nothing; not out of a deliberate principle, but from such entire self-forgetfulness that he does not consider the matter. A really humble man is one of those children of whom our Lord said, "Of such is the Kingdom of Heaven." A little child does not know what it wants; it can do nothing, foresee nothing, but lets itself be carried about. So let us give ourselves up boldly; if God does not use us, it is but just, for we are good for nothing. If He uses us for great purposes, it is for His Own Glory, and we will say, like Mary, "He hath done great things for us, for He hath regarded our lowliness."

## CXXV.

### The Violence which takes the Kingdom of Heaven.

To whom does S. Paul speak, do you think, when he says, "We are fools for Christ's Sake, but ye are wise in Christ"?[1] To you and to me: not to people who know not God, or are unabashed in evil ways. Yes, he speaks to us who are by way of working out our salvation, but who nevertheless shun the folly of the Cross, and seek to seem wise in the world's eyes; to us who are not alarmed at the sight of our own weakness. Where S. Paul felt himself weak we imagine ourselves strong, and in spite of good intentions, we must confess to being in contradiction to the great Apostle. But we cannot suppose that herein we are right. Let us consider the matter, and examine ourselves to see wherein we differ from God's true servants.

Let us "be followers of Paul, even as he was of Christ."[2] He offers himself as the follower of the highest Example. So no more concession to the world or to self, no more indulgence to passion, to the senses, or to spiritual sloth. The practice of virtue does not consist in words; we shall never reach the Kingdom of God by means of them. No, it consists in strength and courage, and in violence done to self; violence whenever we need to resist the world's stream which hinders us from doing right, after having so long led us to do wrong; violence when we must needs give up something

[1] 1 Cor. iv. 10. [2] 1 Cor. xi. 1.

which proves that we are deluding ourselves with a false idea that we have given up all that is superfluous; violence when we have to mortify the mind as well as the body, and not imagine that God is our debtor thereby; violence in lengthening out hours of prayer, reading, and retirement; violence in being always perfectly content with our actual state, not desiring more ease, honour, or health, or more society even of good men,—in short, that violence to self which results in the holy indifference of a Christian who has no will save that of his Creator; who refers the success of all undertakings to Him while prosecuting them heartily himself; who works hard, but without anxiety; who delights to gaze upon God, and is not afraid of His Eye; who trusts that Eye will rest on him to correct his faults, and who does not fear to trust to His Mercy for the punishment of those faults. This is what I would have you and myself to be, and I pray you so to abide, that amid all the trials and worries of a worldly life you may be at peace, and thus may we hope that somewhat of the life of Christ may be seen in us.

## CXXVI.

### On Depression.

As to that sort of depression which seems to wither up your heart, and to make it shrink from everything, there are two rules which I think it is important to observe. First, to use such remedies for this depression as God's Providence supplies you with. For instance, do not overwhelm yourself

with troublesome matters of business, which are too heavy a burden for you to bear; take due precautions, not only for your bodily strength, but also for that of your mind, not undertaking what is too great a strain upon your powers, and reserving certain hours for prayer, reading, and helpful conversation, even taking pains to seek such cheerful society as will refresh both mind and body as they have need.

Further, you ought to have some safe and judicious friend to whom you can unburthen yourself of whatever does not concern other people; such outpouring relieves and comforts an oppressed heart. Troubles which are silently nursed are apt to grow ever greater, until the heart bursts from over-fulness; whereas, if they had been given vent, it would have been discovered that they were not so overwhelming as they seemed. Nothing has a surer tendency to disperse the dark clouds of depression than simplicity and lowliness in laying bare one's troubles, however little to one's own credit it may be so to do, and seeking comfort and light from some worthy servant of God.

My second rule is to bear patiently the involuntary impressions of sadness which remain in spite of the above helps and precautions. Interior trials push us further on in the life of faith than anything else, provided we do not let them stop us altogether, and provided that the involuntary shrinking of the soul does not give way to the depression they cause. A step gained at such a time is enormous, and worth more than a thousand under more propitious circumstances. The great means whereby to make

this feeble state more useful to your soul than the most buoyant strength, is to go perseveringly on and heed your depression as little as possible. Depend upon it, that comfortable vigour which makes everything easy, and congratulates itself on not knowing what hesitation and depression mean, is very treacherous! It feeds self-confidence and exaltation of heart terribly! Sometimes, while greatly edifying the outside world, it is fostering an inward self-satisfaction and self-applause which is a most subtle poison. A man appreciates his own excellence, is gratified by it and satisfied with it, and congratulates himself on his strength. But a soul which feels weak and humble, powerless to help itself, full of fears and shrinking, "sorrowful even unto death," like our Lord Himself in Gethsemane, crying out, as He cried, "My God, why hast Thou forsaken me!" is far better purified, more purged of self, and more dead to its own will, than those vigorous natures which composedly rejoice in their own good qualities. Blessed is he who is cast down and crushed by God's Hand; who is deprived by God of all his own strength, so that he may be stayed on God only; who realises and accepts his own poverty, and who, beyond all external crosses, carries patiently the cross of depression, without which all others are comparatively easy to bear!

## CXXVII.

### On the Thought of Death.

I CANNOT too strongly deprecate the blindness of

most men for persisting in rejecting the thought of death, and turning away from an inevitable event which may be made most blessed by dwelling upon it. Death only alarms the carnal mind: "Perfect love casteth out fear." It is not because one imagines one's self righteous that one ceases to be afraid, but because one loves and resigns one's self unreservedly to Him Whom one loves. This makes death easy and precious. To him who is dead to self bodily death is but the consummation of the work of grace.

Men shun the thought of death as sad, but death will only be sad to those who have not thought of it. It must come sooner or later, and then he who has refused to see the truth in life will be forced to face it in death. Death brings a very clear insight as to all a man has done and all he ought to have done; we shall then see clearly how we ought to have used past grace, talents, wealth, health, time, and all the joys and sorrows of life. The thought of death is the best check we can put upon all our plans and doings. It is right to wish for it, but we must wait for death with the same absolute submission to God's Will as we accept life. It is right to wish for death, inasmuch as it is the consummation of our repentance, the entrance to blessedness, and our eternal reward. A man has no right to say that he wishes to live to do penance for past sins—death is the fullest of penances; our sins will be expiated in death better than by any other penance. It will be as precious to the good as it will be terrible to the wicked. We ask for death daily in the "Our Father." Every one must ask that the

Kingdom of God may come to him. So saying, we must wish for it; for prayer is the heart's desire, and God's Kingdom can only come to us through our death. S. Paul bids Christians "comfort one another" with the thought of death.[1]

## CXXVIII.

### False Notions of Spiritual Progress.

ALMOST all who aim at serving God do so more or less for their own sake. They want to win, not to lose; to be comforted, not to suffer; to possess, not to be despoiled; to increase, not to diminish. Yet all the while our whole interior progress consists in losing, sacrificing, decreasing, humbling, and stripping self even of God's Own Gifts, so as to be more wholly His. We are often like an invalid who feels his own pulse fifty times in the day, and wants the doctor to be perpetually ordering some fresh treatment, or telling him how much better he is. This is very much all the use that some people make of their director. They move round and round in a petty circle of easy virtues, never stepping beyond it heartily and generously; while the director (like the physician) is expected to soothe, comfort, encourage, foster delicacy and fastidiousness, only ordering little sedative treatments, which drop into mere habit and routine. Directly they are deprived of sensible grace, which is as the milk of babes, such people fancy all is lost. But this is a plain proof that they cling overmuch to

[1] 1 Thess. iv. 18.

means, overlooking the end, and that self is their main object. Privations are the food of strong minds : they invigorate the soul, take it out of itself, and offer it as a living sacrifice to God ; but weak people are in despair at the first touch of privation. They fancy that all their work is being overthrown just when it really is beginning to be solidly fixed and thoroughly purified. They are willing to let God do what He will with them, provided always it be something great and perfect ; but they have no notion of being cast down and crushed, or of being offered as a sacrifice to be consumed by the Divine flames. They seek to live by pure faith, yet want to retain all their own worldly wisdom ; to be as children, and yet great in their own eyes. But what a mere spiritual chimera this is ! . . .

## CXXIX.

### Christian Perfection.

CHRISTIAN perfection is not the harsh, wearisome constraint which you imagine. It requires us to belong to God with our whole heart ; and when once that is the case, whatever we do for Him becomes easy. They who are God's are always happy so long as they keep an undivided will, desiring only what He desires, and willing to do whatever He requires. They readily forsake all else, and find a hundred-fold return. Peace of conscience, liberty of mind, the sweetness of giving themselves up wholly to God, the joy of perceiving His Light more and more brightly within the heart,

and freedom from the world's slavery and bondage, —all these make up that hundred-fold blessedness which God's true children possess, amid whatever crosses, so long as they are faithful.

True, they sacrifice themselves, but it is to what they love best ; they suffer, but willingly, and they would rather bear such suffering than the world's unreal delights. Their bodies may be racked with pain, their mind harassed, their spirit weak and perplexed ; but their will is firm and fixed within, and able to utter a stedfast *Amen* to every blow which comes from the Hand of God.

What God requires of us is a will no longer divided between Him and any creature ; a will supple in His Hand, neither asking nor refusing anything ; accepting all He sends unreservedly, and never seeking what He refuses under any pretext whatsoever. To one of such a mind everything turns to good, and the most trifling pursuits are turned into good works. Happy he who gives himself to God ! he is set free from the bondage of his own passions, from the judgments of worldly men, from the malignity and tyranny of their maxims ; from their chilling, heartless mockery ; from the sorrows which the world ascribes to fortune, the inconstancy of friends, the snares of enemies ; from his own weakness ; from the uncertainty of life, the terror of an unholy death, the bitter remorse following on criminal pleasure ; and, finally, from God's eternal condemnation. From all these countless evils he is delivered, inasmuch as, committing his will into God's Hands, he only desires whatever God wills, and thus finds comfort

in faith, and hopes amid all his fears. Surely it is great folly to be afraid to give yourself to God, and to commit yourself to so enviable a condition!

Happy they who cast themselves blindfold and head foremost into the Arms of the Father of Mercies and God of all comfort,[1] as S. Paul says! Then the prominent wish is to know what is owing to God, and the greatest fear not to see clearly enough what He requires. A new light in the path of faith is as welcome as treasure-trove to a miser! The true Christian, come what may, accepts whatever befalls him, and wishes for nought withheld; the more he loves God the happier he is, and the highest perfection, so far from oppressing him, lightens his yoke.

What folly it is to be afraid of giving too much to God! It is to be afraid of being too happy, afraid of loving God's Will always, afraid of having overmuch courage to bear up under inevitable crosses, overmuch comfort in God, of sitting too loose to the passions which make a man wretched.

Learn, then, to despise earthly things for God's Sake. I do not say forsake them altogether; those who are already leading a good, well-regulated life need only to alter their heart's motive. They will do much the same things as before, for God does not set aside the social condition of His servants, or the circumstances with which He surrounds it; but the difference is that you will now do, in order to serve and please God, that which before you did to serve and please the world and yourself. There will be this difference, that instead of being dis-

[1] 2 Cor. i. 3.

tracted by pride, by the tyranny of passion and of the world's malicious criticism, you will act freely, courageously, hopefully ; confidence in expectation of the eternal blessings which await you will uphold you amid trial ; and God's Love, teaching you what you owe to Him, will give you wings to fly in His Ways, and to rise up above all earthly worries. If you find it hard to believe this, experience will show. "O taste and see how gracious the Lord is!"[1]

Our Lord Jesus Christ says to all Christians without exception, "If any man will come after Me, let him take up his cross and follow Me."[2] The broad way leads to destruction ; be it ours to find the narrow way, upon which few enter. None save the "violent" take the Kingdom of Heaven by storm. We must be born again, deny self, abhor it, be as little children, poor in spirit, weep that we may be comforted, and not be of the world, which is condemned "because of offences." These truths seem hard to many people, because they only see what religion requires, without perceiving what it offers, and ignore that loving spirit which makes all easy. They do not know that it leads to the highest perfection by means of a path so loving and peaceful that all toil is eased.

Those who are unreservedly God's are always happy ; they know by experience that our Lord's yoke is light and easy, and that in Him men "find rest for their souls," that He will give rest to the weary and heavy laden. He tells us so Himself.[3] But woe to the timid, cowardly souls who are

[1] Ps. xxxiv. 8. [2] Matt. xvi. 24. [3] *Ibid.* xi. 29, 30.

divided between God and the world! They will, and will not; they are torn asunder both by passion and remorse; they fear both the judgment of God and that of men; they are frightened of what is evil, and ashamed of what is good; they bear all the trials of virtue without any of its comfort. If only they had enough courage to despise idle talk, foolish mockery, and the audacious criticism of men, what peace might they not know in the Bosom of God!

Nothing can be more perilous to salvation, more unworthy both of God and of ourselves, or more damaging to our comfort of heart, than to rest satisfied as we are. Life is given to us expressly that we may march boldly on towards our heavenly Home; the world fleets by like a treacherous shadow, and eternity reaches forth to us. Why should we hesitate to go forward when the light of the Father of Mercies brightens our path? Let us speed onwards to the Kingdom of God.

All excuses for holding back from God are dealt with by the commandment, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind."[1] Observe how many expressions the Holy Spirit gathers together to forestall all the reservations which man might make with respect to this jealous, all-pervading love. All is not too much for Him; He admits of no division, and He suffers no other love, save such as God Himself prescribes in and through His Love. How, then, is it possible to flatter ourselves that we love Him if we will not

[1] Luke x. 27.

study His Law, and diligently seek to fulfil His Will?

It is mere self-deceit for those who shrink from facing what such love requires to fancy that they possess this vigilant, earnest love. There is but one way of loving God, which knows no bargaining with Him, but accepts His every inspiration with a free, generous heart. All such as make some profession, but yet hold on to the world with one hand, run great risk of being among those lukewarm Christians of whom God says that He will "spue them out of His Mouth."[1] He cannot suffer the cowardly souls which say to themselves, "Thus far will I go, but no further." Dare the creature make laws for its Creator? What would a king say to the subject, or a master to the servant, who was afraid of seeming over-zealous in his service, and was ashamed of being publicly known as faithful? How much rather will the King of Kings judge us who do the like?

Nor must we stop short in ascertaining what the general Will of God is. We must seek to know His Will in detail; what pleases Him best; what is the most perfect way. We only act as reasonable beings in so far as we consult God's Will and shape ours to it. There is no other true light to follow; all else is a mere phantasm, a will-o'-the-wisp. Blind indeed are they who think they see, unless they are filled with the only true light, the Light of Christ Jesus! They wander in utter darkness; they are as men who dream, but fancy themselves awake, and take their visions for reality. It is the

[1] Rev. iii. 16.

common delusion of the great and wise men of this world, of all who are deluded by the unreal bliss thereof. None save the children of God walk in the light. What awaits worldly men, full of their own vanity and ambition? Often an earthly downfall, always Death, Judgment, and Eternity: these three things are for ever closing in upon the votaries of this world, but they do not see it. Their policy foresees everything save the inevitable destruction of all they prize most! Blind men, when will ye open your eyes to the Light of Christ, which would reveal to you all the hollowness of what you call great!

Such men know that they are not happy, and they hope to become so by means of the very things which make them miserable; they are troubled by reason of that which they have not, and that which they have cannot satisfy them. Their troubles are very real; their joys are fugitive, hollow, embittered, and cost more than they are worth. All life is with them a prolonged experience of error; eternal judgment hangs over their head; their unreal happiness will speedily turn to never-ending tears and groans. Their life is as a fleeting shadow, or, at best, as a flower springing up in the morning, withered, dried up, and trampled under foot ere night. We have seen such foolish worldlings prostrate and trembling at the prospect of death, confessing their delusion, and deploring it. Sometimes such men rush from one extreme to the other, and after being devoid of all respect for religion, they become superstitious and cowardly. Is it not horrible that men should be willing to risk eternity

rather than restrain their evil passions? Yet nothing is commoner. Point out as much as you will the vanity and emptiness of the creature, the uncertainty of life, the changeableness of fortune, the faithlessness of friends, the worthlessness of high position and its inevitable drawbacks, the uncertainty of all hopes, the unreality of what we possess and the reality of what we suffer,—true as all this may be, it does not reach them more than superficially. The man is not touched at heart; he goes on sighing to be yet more and more the slave of this world's vanities.

What can be done to rouse him from this pitiable state? He must pray for light; he must be brought to realise the depth of God's Mercy and the depth of his own fallen nature. Then he will hate himself, fly from and renounce self, throw himself upon God, and be lost in Him. Blessed loss, wherein he will find the true self! No more self-seeking, yet all will turn to his good; for "all things work together for good to them that love God," and are filled with His Spirit. Miserable indeed are they who are without that Spirit, yet none are really without it save they who ask it not, or ask amiss. It is not with the lips, or external acts only, that we can win to us that Spirit of Life without Whom the best deeds are lifeless; but by the heart's desire, by a thorough prostration of self before God. He is so good, He waits but our hearty desire to fill us to overflowing with that gift which is Himself. He has said that the cry is not formed by the lips—scarce conceived by the heart—before He grants the prayer. But it is the heart's prayer which He

grants. The way to learn this prayer is to fix upon some mystery or truth, and meditate silently upon it; and then having grasped it, apply it to yourself, make resolutions before God concerning your duties and your faults, ask Him to give you strength to accomplish that which He moves you to promise. When you perceive that your mind is wandering, recall it quietly, but never give way to discouragement because of the persistency of these troublesome distractions. So long as they are involuntary they cannot hurt you; on the contrary, they may profit you more than a warm and lively season of prayer, because they will mortify and humble you, and teach you to seek God for Himself only, not for the pleasure which comes with the search.

But beyond such prayer, for which you must set aside special seasons (for no occupations, however necessary, ought ever to engross you to the exclusion of your daily bread), you should accustom yourself to frequent short, simple upliftings of heart to God. A few words of a Psalm or Gospel, or any other part of Holy Scripture which comes home to you, will do; and such ejaculatory prayer can go on, however you may be surrounded by people, without their knowing it. Such devotions are often more helpful than a more systematic continuous prayer. It would be well for you to resolve that morning and afternoon you will thus lift up your heart; that you will think upon God whenever you see certain things or people; to forecast and prepare what you will do under certain circumstances. In this way you will learn to maintain a constant familiar sense of the Presence of God, and nothing

will so tend to loosen you from the world as that Presence. It is when beholding God that we realise the emptiness of the world, which will ere long pass away like a cloud; all grandeur and pomp will vanish as a dream, the proud will be brought low, the powerful laid helpless, the mighty bowed beneath the Eternal Majesty of God. In His judgment-day He will extinguish all that glitters now, as the rising sun puts out the starlight. Then we shall see nought save God; seek as we may, we shall find nought save Him. Where, we shall ask in that day, are the pleasant things which lured us? what were they? what remains of them? Not even a token by which to trace them! They have melted away like the mist before the sun; we can scarce say that they ever were, they did but appear for an instant, and are gone!

But even were the world not thus passing away, it must leave you, do what you will—a little sooner or later, what matters it? A few more rapidly rolling years, flowing past like a river, vanishing like a dream, youth will be gone, the world will look elsewhere, and reject those who have not already learnt to reject it. That time is coming—it is here; let us forestall it! Let us love that eternal beauty which never grows old, and which endows its lovers with perpetual youth; let us reject a world already crumbling into ruin. How many we have seen fall from our own platform into the arms of death and eternity, and a new world springs up around! We need not grow very old to find that old friends pass away and we form new ties. Family groups disperse; the Court we once haunted is altogether

changed ; the men we admired are gone, and have made room for others who will also soon pass away. Where are all the great actors who have filled that scene during the last thirty years? Or not to go so far back, how many are dead within the last seven or eight years? We shall soon follow them. Is it worth while, then, to cleave so stedfastly to such a world, into which we have scarce entered before we must quit it? a world which is but a phantom, "a shadow which passeth." O frail and foolish world, shame on thee to think to dazzle us with thy tinsel tawdriness! thy smile cannot hide the pains thou bringest ; a moment, and thou art gone, and yet thou darest affect to promise us bliss! There is no bliss save to him who sees thy emptiness by the light of Christ Jesus!

The fearful thing is that such thousands blind themselves, shunning the light which condemns their deeds of darkness. They have chosen the life of the beasts which perish, and they refuse to realise any other life, degrading themselves more and more to stifle shame and remorse. They ridicule men who think seriously, and call those foolish who strive to live to God. But you must shun the society of such men persistently. It is most important to break off all intercourse with those you know to be dangerous ; and the more you are exposed to it, the more you must watch over yourself, redouble your exertions, be diligent in prayer and reading, in frequenting the Sacraments, without which you grow weak, and liable to temptation.

When we ask God for our daily bread in the

Lord's Prayer, we assuredly mean the Eucharist. Why, then, do we not eat that daily bread each day, or at all events very frequently? To be worthier to do so, learn gradually to overcome self, to be stedfast in virtue, and to refer continually to God in hearty, though brief prayer. So the taste for past foul pleasure will insensibly vanish, and a new attraction of grace will fill your heart. You will hunger after Jesus Christ, Who will feed you to life eternal. The more you eat that Holy Bread, the stronger your faith will be; you will fear nothing so much as to shut yourself out from the Holy Table by any sin; your devotions, far from being a constraint or burden, will be your comfort and refreshment. Strive, then, to be prepared frequently to approach that Blessed Sacrament, without which your spiritual life will languish and wax cold, and you will row against the tide without advancing; whereas, by feeding on the Body of Christ and His Word, you will be as a ship in full sail before a favouring wind. Blessed are they who are in such a state, or at all events long after it!

## CXXX.

### On the Right Use of Trials.

PEOPLE find it very hard to believe that God heaps crosses on those He loves out of loving-kindness. Why should He take pleasure in causing us to suffer? they ask. Could He not make us good without making us miserable? Yes, doubtless God could do so, for to Him all things are possible.

His All-powerful Hands hold the hearts of men, and turn them as He pleases, as he who commands the source of a reservoir turns the stream whither he will. But though God could save us without crosses, He has not willed so to do, just as He has willed that men should grow up through the weakness and troubles of childhood, instead of being born fully developed men. He is the Master: we can only be silent, and adore His Infinite Wisdom without understanding it. The one thing we do see plainly is that we cannot become really good save in so far as we become humble, unselfish, in all things turning from self to God.

But the operation of grace in turning us thus from self cannot save through a miracle of that same grace—be other than painful, and God does not perform continual miracles in the order of grace any more than in the order of nature. It would be as great a miracle in the first sense were we to see one full of himself die suddenly to self-consciousness and self-interest, as to see a child go to bed a mere child, and rise up the next morning a man of thirty! God hides His work beneath a series of imperceptible events, both in the order of grace and of nature, and thus He subjects us to the mysteries of the faith. Not only does He accomplish His work gradually, but He does it by the most simple and likely means, so that its success appears natural to men; otherwise all God does would be as a perpetual miracle, which would overthrow the life of faith by which He would have us exist.

Such a life of faith is necessary, not only to mould

the good, by causing them to sacrifice their own reason amid a world of darkness, but also to blind those whose presumption misleads them. Such men behold God's works without comprehending them, and take them to be simply natural. They are without true intelligence, inasmuch as that is only given to those who mistrust their own judgment, and the proud wisdom of man is unworthy to enter into the counsels of God.

So it is in order that the operation of grace may abide a mystery of faith that God permits it to be slow and painful. He makes use of the inconstancy, the ingratitude of men, of the disappointments and failures which attend human prosperity, to detach us from the creature and its good things. He opens our eyes by letting us realise our own weakness and evil in endless falls. It all seems to go on in the natural course of events, and this series of apparently natural causes consumes us like a slow fire. We would fain be consumed at once by the flames of pure love, but so speedy a process would cost us nothing, and it is in very selfishness that we seek to attain perfection so cheaply and so fast.

Why do we rebel against our prolonged trials? Because of self-love; and it is that very self-love that God purposes to destroy, for so long as we cleave to self His work is not achieved. What right have we to complain? We suffer from an excessive attachment to the creature—above all, to self. God orders a series of events which detach us gradually from the first, and finally from the last also. The operation is painful, but our corruption makes it needful, and therefore it is we suffer so

keenly. If the flesh were sound, the surgeon would not need to probe it; he uses his knife in proportion to the depth of the wound and the extent of proud flesh. If we feel his operation too keenly, it is because the disease is active. Is it cruelty which makes the surgeon probe us to the quick? No, far otherwise, it is skill and kindness; he would do the same by his only child.

Even so God treats us. He never puts us to any pain save unwillingly; His fatherly Heart does not desire to grieve us, but He cuts to the quick that He may heal the ulcers of our spiritual being. He must needs tear from us that which we love amiss, unreasonably and excessively, or to the hindrance of His Love. And so doing, He causes us to cry out like a child from whom one takes the knife with which it would maim or kill itself. We cry loudly in our despair, and murmur against God, as the petulant babe against its mother: but He lets us cry, and saves us nevertheless. He only afflicts us for our correction; even when He seems to overwhelm us, it is for our own good, and to spare us the greater evil we should do to ourselves. The things for which we weep would have caused us eternal woe; that which we count as lost was then indeed most lost when we fancied it our own. God has stored it up safely, to be returned to us in eternity, which is fast drawing near. He does but deprive us of the things we prize in order to teach us to love them purely, truly, and highly; in order that we may enjoy them for ever in His Presence; in order to do a hundred-fold better for us than we can even desire for ourselves.

Nothing can happen in the world save what God wills. He does all, arranges all, makes all to be as it is. He counts the hairs of our head, the leaves of every tree, the sand on the seashore, the drops of water which form the mighty ocean. When He made the world, His Wisdom weighed and measured every atom. Every moment He renews and sustains the breath of life. He knows the number of our days; He holds the cords of life or death. What seems to us weightiest is as nothing in the eyes of God; a little longer or shorter life becomes an imperceptible difference before Him. What matters it whether this frail vessel, this poor clay, be thrown aside a little sooner or later? How short-sighted and erring we are! We are aghast at the death of one in the flower of his age. "What a sad loss!" men cry out. But to whom is the loss? What does he who dies lose? Some few years of vanity, delusion, and peril! God takes him away from the evil, and saves him from his own weakness and the world's wickedness. What do they lose who love him? The danger of earthly happiness, a treacherous delight, a snare which caused them to forget God and their own welfare; but, in truth, they gain the blessing of detachment through the cross. That same blow by which he who dies is saved fits those who are left to work out their salvation in hope. Surely, then, it is true that God is very good, very loving, very pitiful to our real needs, even when He seems to overwhelm us, and we are most tempted to call Him hard!

What difference is there now between two people who died during the last century, one some twenty

years, say, before the other? Both are dead now; their departure seems to us now but as the same thing; and soon all that is separated will be reunited, and there will be no trace left of that brief separation. Men seem to think this life immortal, or at least likely to endure for ages! Yet every day the living are treading rapidly after the dead; and the man who is just about to start upon a journey need not feel so very far off him who went yesterday. Life rushes on like a torrent: already the past is but a dream; the present, even while we think we grasp it, slips from us and becomes the past, and it will be no otherwise with the future. Days, months, years hurry on like the surging waves of a flood; a few moments more, and all will be ended. Verily, what now seems long, by reason of weariness and sadness, will seem short enough when it is over.

It is owing to the sensitiveness of self-love that we are so alive to our own condition. The sick man who cannot sleep thinks the night endless, yet it is no longer than any other night. In our cowardice we exaggerate all we suffer; our pain may be severe, but we make it worse by shrinking under it. The real way to get relief is to give one's self up heartily to God; to accept suffering, because God sends it to purify us and make us worthier Him. The world smiled upon you, and was as a poison to your soul. Would you wish to go on in ease, pleasure, display, in the pride of life and soul-destroying luxury, clinging to the world, which is Christ's enemy, rejecting the cross, which alone can sanctify you up to the hour of death? The world

will turn away, forget, despise, ignore you. Well, need you wonder that the world is worldly, unjust, deceitful, treacherous? Yet you are not ashamed to love this world, from which God snatches you to deliver you from its bondage and make you free, and you complain of your very deliverance. It is as your own enemy that you are so alive to the world's indifference, that you cannot endure what is for your real good, and so keenly regret what is fatal to you. This is the source of all your grief and pain.

O my God, Who beholdest the depths of our misery, Thou alone canst heal us! Give us faith, love, hope, Christian courage. Help us to turn our eyes continually to Thee, O All-powerful Father, and to Thy Son, our Example in suffering. Thou didst nail Him, the Man of Sorrows, to the Cross, that we might learn the blessing of suffering. Let our ease-loving nature be silent when we gaze on Jesus steeped in shame and agony. Lift up our hearts, strengthen them against self; make us to fear nought save displeasing Thee, save eternal loss, instead of fearing what will be our infinite gain. Lord, Thou knowest the weakness and misery of Thy creature. I have nothing—but what matter, so long as I have Thee, so long as I can seek Thee with certainty of finding all that is not to be found in myself!

## CXXXI.

### Peace of Conscience.

THERE is never any peace for those who resist God.

If there is any happiness in this world, it belongs to those whose conscience is pure ; the whole earth is but pain and anguish to the evil conscience. How different God's peace is from that which the world assumes, but cannot really give ! God's Peace stills all passion, ensures purity of conscience and unfailing justice ; it unites a man to God, and strengthens him against temptation. This purity of conscience is preserved by frequenting the Sacraments. All temptation, when resisted, bears its fruit for good ; peace of heart lies in perfect resignation to God's Will.

"Martha, Martha, thou art careful and troubled about many things : but one thing is needful."[1] True simplicity, that calmness which results from complete submission to whatever God wills, patience and forbearance towards the faults of others, frankness and childlike docility in confessing your faults, accepting reproof, and receiving counsel—these are the solid graces which will tend to your sanctification. . . .

The anxiety which so many things cause you comes from your not sufficiently accepting whatever happens as coming from God. Leave all in His Hands, and offer all up to Him beforehand. From the moment you give up all self-will, and seek absolutely nothing but what He wills, you will be free from all your restless anxiety and forecasting ; there will be nothing to conceal, nothing to bring about. Short of that you will be uneasy, changeable, easily put out, dissatisfied with yourself and with others, full of reserve and mistrust. Your

[1] Luke x, 41, 42.

talents, unless chastened and humbled, will but torment you; your piety, though sincere, will do more in the way of inward reproach than of support and consolation. But once give yourself up to God, and you will be at rest, and filled with the joys of His Holy Spirit.

Woe to you if you lean upon man instead of God! In the matter of selecting a spiritual guide you must set aside all personal interests; the smallest degree of human respect will cut off grace, and increase your perplexity. You will suffer greatly, and displease God.

We are constrained to love God because He first loved us, and that with a tender love, as a Father Who pitieth His children, knowing their frailty, and the clay out of which He has formed them. He sought us in our own paths, which are sin; He followed us as a shepherd wearies himself in seeking his lost sheep. He is not content with finding us; having found us, He carries us and our weariness,—"He was obedient unto the death upon the Cross;" "He loved us unto death,"—and His Obedience can only be measured by His Love. When a soul is filled with that Love, it will enjoy peace of conscience, and be content and happy. It will need neither grandeur, fame, pleasure, nor anything which passes away; it will crave nothing but the Will of God, but will watch continually in a blessed expectation of the Bridegroom's coming.

## CXXXII.

### Anxiety as to the Future.

I WISH you all the benefit you are seeking in retreat: above all, that you may find rest in a simple line of conduct, without looking forward anxiously to the future. That future is in God's Hands, not yours; God will rule it according to your need. But if you seek to forecast it in your own wisdom, you will gain nothing but anxiety and anticipation of inevitable trouble. Try only to make use of each day; each day brings its own good and evil, and sometimes what seems evil becomes good if we leave it to God, and do not forestall Him in our impatience.

Be sure that God will grant you whatever time you need to attain to Him. Perhaps He may not give you as much as you would like for your own plans, or to please yourself under the pretext of seeking perfection, but you will find that neither time nor opportunity for renunciation of self and self-pleasing will be lacking. All other time is lost, however well spent it may seem. Be assured that you will find all such matters adapted to your real needs. In proportion as God disconcerts your own inclinations He will uphold your weakness. Do not be afraid, leave all to Him; only by a quiet, pleasant, well-regulated system of occupation avert melancholy and *ennui*, which are the most dangerous temptation to your natural disposition. You will always find freedom in God so long as you do not give way to the fancy that you have lost your liberty.

## CXXXIII.

### On Direction.

THE best things are often the most spoilt, because their abuse is worse than that of what is less good. And this accounts for direction being so much run down. The world looks upon it as the art of leading weak minds, and using them for self-interested purposes. The director is supposed to be a man who makes use of religion to insinuate himself, to govern, to satisfy his own ambition; and where the other sex is concerned, direction is often suspected of great trifling and unworthiness. So many people who have neither been trained nor duly selected meddle with the direction of souls, that we cannot wonder if irregularities and unedifying events sometimes occur.

Nevertheless, it is equally true that amid such deplorable occurrences the office of leading souls to God is that ministry of life which was committed by our Lord Jesus Christ to His Apostles; and therefore direction is a sacred office which must not be despised, although it may be lowered and dishonoured by men who are unworthy of so great trust. Surely it were folly to despise a diamond because it is found sticking in a heap of dirt! Jesus Christ has done nothing without a purpose. He has set pastors over His flock, and they should direct it; for the pastor's duty is to lead the sheep, to know them each individually ("He calleth . . . by name"[1]), so our Lord tells us, to be quicksighted

[1] John x. 3.

to their wants, to study their diseases, bear with their infirmities, find out the fitting remedies; to seek those that go astray, and carry them on his shoulders back to the fold; to lead the sound sheep to good pastures, and protect them from the ravening wolf. This is the part of the true director; and no other save the natural pastor would be needed if these pastors, overwhelmed with the number of their flocks, and sometimes themselves ill adapted to their pastoral work, did not often lack the time, zeal, and experience necessary to lead souls on to evangelical perfection. Some one of these three things is often wanting among the natural pastors, and therefore we are permitted to choose some saintly priest to take up the pastor's work and authority, according as he may be most suited to carry out the work of God's ministry on behalf of each one of us. It is a supplement to the deficiency of pastoral work.

This seems to me the true idea of direction; and such a director, says S. Francis de Sales, ought to be chosen from out a thousand—nay, from out ten thousand! He should be wise, enlightened, self-restrained, experienced, detached from earthly things, incapable of flattery, clear of the slightest suspicion as to doctrine or precept, upright, firm, indifferent to the world and its dazzling greatness in a word, so entirely a man of God, as to seek Him only in all his counsels. You will say it is easier to describe such a man than to find him! True, but such are to be found if they are rightly sought. I will tell you how to seek him.

First of all, give due heed to a man's public

character, in order to avoid such as are undesirable. I do not mean that you should seek out men who are in fashion, or sought after in the great world, but that you should avoid those who are generally disapproved, or looked upon as questionable by competent people. Both good and bad reputations, which are very general, have for the most part some foundation. As to men who have a certain fashionable name, it is absurd to seek them ; it is merely carrying worldliness and vanity into the most weighty religious matters, seeking to be conspicuous, to be classed among people of consequence, to make good connections—in short, it is a bit of hypocritical vanity which separates a man from God, and extinguishes the Spirit of Grace. Do you seek a director who has nothing to do with the world, and is not sought of it, and who, so far from forwarding you in it, will lead you from it.

With this view find out the simplest, most solid men, those least given to show, whose own conduct gives reason to suppose that their counsellors are wise ; men who make so good a use of direction that you may fairly believe their choice has been good, and that they can help you to find what you want. It is well to see the director you think of choosing several times, and make trial of consulting him, to find out whether you can speak to him with all necessary freedom, and whether you are likely to get what you want from him. You should see to this before deciding, so as not to be exposed to a change afterwards. Beware of choosing a director in order to please others, out of any policy, or by mere accidental circumstances—from any other

reason, in short, save because you have found a true man of God. A choice made from worldly motives might imperil your salvation. If any one has unhappily fallen into such an error, his only remedy is to stop short bravely, and set his conscience free to seek the help he needs elsewhere.

But, you will say, what is the good of all these investigations in the case of a person who is not competent to judge of a director's capacity? I grant that the generality of people are scarcely capable of exercising so much discernment, and that we might despair of their making a good choice if we trusted solely to their natural powers; but God's Goodness supplies that which is wanting to man's capacity in what concerns a nearer approach to Himself. When you have given yourself up to His fatherly guidance, follow what He will put into your heart in all simplicity. A good intention, a simple heart, disinterestedness and freedom from self-will, a fear of falling into hands not best fitted for carrying out God's Will in you, and, lastly, trust in His Grace, will be your guides; He will see your heart, and will satisfy it according to your faith. Try only to seek a director with a view to learn entire self-mortification, and to put away self entirely. God, Who never fails those who are true of heart, will grant your heart's desire, and will send the Angel Raphael to you. Mind, I am not counting on your wisdom, but on God. Pray continually, humble yourself, set aside all that has a semblance of self-seeking in it; let there be nothing to make you unworthy of the help you crave. Put away whatever might hinder your docility to the guide you

seek, and he will not be denied you ; I cannot say how he will come, but he will come. A conversation, a chance, some mere trifle will open your eyes, and you will perceive the man you want.

He will have his faults, like any other man—natural defects, which may repulse you, and tempt you to disobedience ; but we should have to give up all obedience to men if we are to wait till they are perfect. Moreover, he will be subject to imperfections in the matter of grace, which will be still more trying ; but they will do no harm, provided he—the director—does not foster them by resisting the Spirit of Grace. And if his intentions were to cease to be pure and upright, God would not suffer him to go on directing simple, recollected souls which had given themselves up in good faith to his guidance. As to the trifling imperfections which are permitted to linger about the holiest directors for their own humiliation, it is very important not to take scandal at them. They are often very useful, for they make a man gentle, lowly, meek, able to sympathise, by reason of his own experience, with the foibles of those he directs, patient in awaiting the slow workings of grace, attentive in watching for God's opportunities, incapable of being taken by surprise when he encounters failings, and, finally, moderate in his zeal. It was through his wicked denial of our Lord, say the Fathers, that S. Peter became fit to be the foremost Apostle, and to feel for the infirmities of each member of his flock. As to perfection in a director, you have doubtless a right to look for it, but it is not possible to compare men's perfec-

tions, or to judge of their real inner life; so that you must be guided by the main outward tokens visible, such as detachment, a retired life, steady perseverance in duty, patience, gentleness, even temper, the absence of all luxury and frivolity, stedfastness in good, without harshness or excess, experience in prayer and the interior life, and, lastly, a certain aptness to give necessary help to those who seek it without lapsing into useless intercourse. There should be nothing save what is serious, modest, and edifying in interviews which simply concern eternal life. The director loses his authority, lowers his ministry, becomes unworthy of it, and does mortal harm to souls, if he is not serious and reserved in his demeanour. Not that such a reserve hinders that expansion of heart, fatherly kindness, and ease which are necessary to attract souls, for genuine seriousness is simple, kindly, considerate, and even cheerful; it is far removed from a harsh, affected severity which repels men. But, unfortunately, lax, self-indulgent people, especially women, are apt to suppose that whatever is serious and grave must be cold and hard; and they will fancy that they are not properly attended to if they are not allowed to say a hundred useless things before coming to the real point. In this way they are disgusted with the directors who would help them most, and rather take to such as are willing to waste time over them. Oh, if all such people would but consider how precious time is to a priest who is bound to pray for himself and the whole Church, to meditate deeply on God's Law, and to work incessantly to win sinful souls,

they would fear to waste such valuable time in superfluous talk!

You ought to talk to God's minister in a simple, straightforward, accurate, concise way, remembering how many claims he has upon his time. It is just because people are neither simple nor humble that they do not go straight to their point, but beat about so lengthily before coming to the real question. Moreover, many persons really aim more at a merely comfortable intercourse than at a vigorous, straightforward direction which will help them to find God through self-denial.

If people only sought the counsels of perfection, direction would not take up much time. We do not want a great many consultations, when it is only a question of silence, obedience, endurance, retirement, patient forbearance towards others without expecting the same for ourselves, resistance to inclination and habit, conformity to God's designs for us, setting aside jealousy and touchiness. Upright souls are content to say little and do much. There is still less room for much consultation in Community life, where everything is regulated by constitutions, daily rules, and the orders of Superiors. God's Will is in the heart; and if Superiors make mistakes, or are partial, their orders, however damaging to themselves, will not fail to be good for us, and their very failings sometimes help us more than their virtues to set at nought our own self-will. God turns everything to the sanctification of His children when they lean upon Him with pure hearts.

Further, I would say that when the Superiors of a Community have the requisite qualities,

experience and holiness, to guide others, their guidance is preferable to that which comes from without; and in like manner, when other things are equal, the pastor is preferable to a stranger. It is a mistake to surround direction with so much mystery. It is practically counsel taken in order to help forward a person's perfection. A Superior who has acquired the habit of self-mortification, and has gained experience, will see more readily what needs correction, what are the natural habits and disposition of an inferior, what will help him most in his daily course, than one from without who cannot watch his ordinary life, and only knows him through the medium of his own representations.

Some may say, with reference to religion, What need is there for a director, when the Rule is a written direction, and one's will has been already surrendered to one's Superiors? To this I answer that Superiors cannot always give as much attention as your interior life may claim, while it is all-important that you should not direct yourself, for you would be blind in any matter which concerns your own interest, or where some disguised passion influences you. You do not know what the source is of troubles which disgust you with your duties and make you slothful in your calling; you want to be upheld and encouraged under a trial which bears you down; you are exposed to trying, perilous temptation: well, in all such cases nothing is more dangerous than to listen only to your own heart's promptings, and you need a man of God who will take the place of pastor, and who will give diligence in guiding you amid all these precipices. Who will

guide and uphold you? Yourself? But it is you yourself who need to be guided, who are tempted, weak, blind, disheartened, at war with yourself. Your sharpest temptations come from self; you are your own worst enemy. You need some one who is not suffering from your faults or passions or self-willed leanings, some one from without, to help you to get free; some one who will be as earnest in striving to correct your faults as you often are to palliate and condone them.

Again, prayer—which is the channel of all grace, and the means of union with God—is exposed to all manner of deceptions and illusions unless you are directed by some one who is experienced in God's Ways. The very remedy which is intended to heal all your sickness may be turned to deadly poison. You need a gentle, temperate direction, but one which is stedfast and firm, which will drag you away from your passions, humble your mind, take away your self-conceit and self-reliance, undeceive your high ideas of your own wisdom, and hinder you from seeking in God's Gifts that which can be found in Himself only. So far from thinking such help unnecessary, you may well cry out, "What can I do without such an one? But where is he to be found? is there such help on earth for me?" God will find him for you, if you deserve it by the sincerity of your intentions.

My God, if I dared murmur, the only thing of which I could complain would be that Thou dost not send more such guides into Thy Church. There are so many who have a show of godliness without real knowledge or holiness! so many who possess

merely a dull dry learning, but are incapable of understanding Thy Ways, and whom therefore Thou justly rejected! I thank Thee, Lord, for that Thou dost hide the mysteries of Thy Grace from such men, who are great in their own eyes, while Thou revealest them to the meek and lowly. There are many learned and pious men whose piety is unpractical, and who remain without, never having been drawn within the courts of Thy Sanctuary. It is sad to think how such directors, in spite of good intentions, hinder and keep back souls, which they only narrow, whereas God's Holy Spirit seeks to enlarge them! Others, again, have only experience without learning; or, more correctly, they fancy that they have experience without really possessing it. How full of danger all these things are! Where, then, O God, are the bright shining lamps fixed in Thy House to enlighten and kindle Thy children? Sadly few they are in number; where shall we find them? Blessed are those that find them; let all such thank Thee, and make good use of their advantage. Honest, straightforward, simple souls, where are ye? tell me where to find you, and I shall know where good directors are to be found, for God will give them to such as you; you will draw them forth by your prayers. God will raise them up expressly to carry out His plans for you, because you have given yourselves up freely to His Grace. Other men will go on with insufficient help; they deserve no better, for the Heavenly Father gives to each one of His children in proportion to the measure of his faith and hearty trust in God.

## CXXXIV.

### On Frequent Communion.

I AM in nowise surprised, sir, to learn from your letter that certain persons are scandalised at seeing you communicate almost daily. Such people form their opinion of your frequent communions solely upon certain preconceived ideas of the penitential discipline of the early Church. But in this case it is not a question of men guilty of mortal sin, who must necessarily submit to the discipline of repentance before communicating; it is a question of the faithful Christian, whose conscience seems to be clean, who leads a regular life, is sincerely devout, and submissive to the direction of an experienced spiritual guide. This Christian is weak, but he is conscious of his own weakness, and has recourse to the Heavenly Food for strength; he is full of imperfections, but he mourns over them, and strives diligently to correct them. I have no hesitation in saying that a wise director, to whom he is obedient in all simplicity, may and ought to permit such a man to communicate almost daily. My reasons are as follows:—

I. The Fathers teach us that the Eucharist is that daily bread for which we ask in the Lord's Prayer. Jesus Christ gives Himself to us beneath the form of bread, the natural food of man, in order to associate us with His Risen and Glorious Body; and thus the institution of the Blessed Sacrament, interpreted by Catholic tradition, invites us to daily communion. Indeed, the Fathers apply to the

Eucharist that parable in which our Lord describes the king who, having made ready his feast, and hearing the empty excuses of his invited guests, sends forth first to the "streets and lanes," and then to the "highways and hedges," to seek men, who are to be "compelled to come in, that the house may be filled."[1]

In primitive times this spirit of the original institution was followed. The first faithful "continued stedfastly in the Apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread and in prayers." "All that believed were together," and "they, continuing DAILY with one accord in the temple, and *breaking bread* from house to house,"[2] etc.; by which "fellowship in the breaking of bread," we learn from tradition, was meant participation in the Eucharist. Thus we gather that those faithful who led a Christian life were *daily* fed with the heavenly bread in one place or another. S. Paul confirms this fact: "When ye come together in one place," he says, "this is not to eat the Lord's Supper."[3] The "coming together" was for that purpose, and the Apostle, rebuking the Corinthians for neglect of the "Lord's Supper" amid the disorderly habits into which they had lapsed, indicates that their assembly had lost its purpose through irreverent use of that holy food. According to the Apostle's explanation of the institution, the "coming together" was "to eat the Lord's Supper:" the two things formed a whole.

In those early times three things were never separated, namely, the gathering together, the

[1] Luke xiv. 23. [2] Acts ii. 42. [3] 1 Cor. xi. 20.

mystic feast, and the love-feast following, called *Agape*. All the faithful met together, all communicated, and all ate in common after the Communion. If your critics appeal to antiquity, by all means, here it is. What can be more primitive or purer testimony than the Acts of the Apostles and S. Paul's Epistles?

Such critics may reply that these early Christians were saints. Granted. The word *saint* means a man called out from among sinners, and in this sense all good men are saints, inasmuch as they are separated by God's sanctifying grace from His enemies. But without pretending to put Christians of our day on the same level with those of the early Church, I cannot but observe that while the Apostles apply the word *saint* to the faithful of that period, they also rebuke them for many failings, such as jealousy, partiality, dissension, etc. We find labourers in the vineyard of the Gospel, such as Demas, forsaking it "for love of the present world;" and you need only turn to S. Cyprian's writings to ascertain that the early faithful fell into so much laxity and such grievous disorder, that it needed persecution to revive their faith. S. Cyprian says that long repose had corrupted their traditionary discipline, until heavenly correction revived their drooping, dormant faith. "Every one was absorbed in increasing his patrimony, and, forgetting alike what was the rule of the faithful in the Apostles' times, and ought always to be their rule, they were greedily intent on heaping up riches. There was no more zeal among the pastors, nor fervent belief among those ministering at the altars,

no mercy in good works, no discipline in manners. The men disfigured their beards, and the women painted their faces; God's handiwork was disguised. The hearts of the simple were led astray by wiles, and the brethren were deluded by evil stratagem; unholy marriages were contracted with unbelievers, and the members of Christ offered to idols. False witness and perjury prevailed; authorities were set at nought, and men slandered one another pitilessly, amid their implacable hatred. Many Bishops, who should have upheld the people by their teaching and example, despised the Lord's ministry committed to them, and were involved in secular callings, forsaking their pulpits and flocks to wander in foreign countries in pursuit of merchants' gain. Needy members of the Church were left in want while they were amassing riches; by fraud and lying they usurped other men's goods, and indulged in frightful usury. At the first appearance of the enemy a large proportion of brethren betrayed their faith, not carried away by the torrent of persecution, but voluntarily lapsing."[1]

Again, we need only read what S. Augustine says to his catechumens, to prepare them for finding many whose lives are slack among professing Christians. He goes so far as to say that a man must himself be good in order to find out who in the Church is good. Nor can we forget that among the faithful at Corinth there were some who fell into grievous faults even at the Sacred Feast itself, so that S. Paul exclaims, "This is not to eat the Lord's Supper. . . . Despise ye the house of

[1] *De Lapsis*, iv.

God? . . . Shall I praise you in this? I praise you not. . . . For this cause many are weak and sickly among you, and many sleep."[1] So even the primitive Christians, even those who were under apostolic guidance, were by no means free from imperfection ; yet they "continued daily in breaking of bread," etc. Surely the faithful of our time may follow them in DAILY breaking of bread, so long as they are humble and earnest in striving to correct their faults.

II. The Canons attributed to the Apostles are doubtless very ancient, and contain the ordinary discipline of primitive times. The IXth Canon says that "if a clerk, having offered his oblation with others, does not communicate, he shall state his reasons, so that, if valid, they may be accepted ; if not, he shall be excluded from Communion, as giving cause for scandal to the people." So we see that in early times it was a scandal for a clerk to make his offering without communicating, and that such scandal was punished by privation of the Sacrament.

The Xth Canon says that "all the faithful who come to Church, hear Holy Scripture, but do not remain for prayer or communicate, shall be deprived of Communion (that is, be excommunicated), because they are a source of scandal to the Church."

So you see the scandal given, either by clerk or layman, by offering his oblation without partaking, was so great that both were excommunicated. We see by this how rare and extraordinary a thing it was for any of the faithful to assist at the Divine

[1] 1 Cor. xi.

Mysteries without communicating, and that when such did occur, that he was bound to remove the scandal by giving his reasons for avoiding Communion.

III. If we appeal to antiquity, let us hear what S. Justin says, a martyr almost contemporary with the Apostles. "When he who presides has made the thanksgiving, and all the people have gladly joined with him, confirming what has been done with their prayers, those whom we call deacons and ministers distribute to all present the bread and wine which were the matter of thanksgiving, so that all may partake. This food we call the Eucharist, and none other may partake of it. . . . We do not take it as common food or drink. But even as our Lord Jesus, made Flesh by the Word of God, took to Himself human flesh and blood for love of us, so we have learnt that this food over which the thanksgiving has been spoken, in order that it may ineffably feed our flesh and blood, is the Flesh and Blood of the Incarnate Jesus. . . . On the day called after the sun, all who are in town or country assemble in one place. . . . Together we rise to pray. Prayers ended, we offer bread, wine, and water. All those who are present share in the distribution and communication of those things which were the matter of thanksgiving, and then they are sent to the absent by the hands of the deacons."

It is essential to observe that, according to this trustworthy description, the Eucharist was not only distributed to each of the faithful present, but further, it was sent by the deacons to such as were absent.

So far were they in those days from thinking that any of the faithful present ought to be deprived of it, or that even those who were unavoidably absent ought to undergo so hard and dangerous a privation on the day of solemn assembly. It is true that S. Justin only speaks of the Sunday gathering together; but at that time the Christians were often unable, owing to persecution, to meet together daily, and we learn from Tertullian that after receiving the Eucharist from the hands of their ministers on the day of assembly, each one kept the consecrated bread at home, and made his fasting Communion privately.

IV. Tertullian, commenting on the words "Give us this day our daily bread," says: "In the Bread is understood His Body—*This is My Body.* Wherefore in praying for daily bread we pray to be perpetually in Christ, and undivided from His Body."[1] This, then, is a daily prayer for the Holy Eucharist as our food for each day. Again, Tertullian, warning his wife against second marriage with a heathen, says: "The more thou shalt take care to hide, the more suspected wilt thou be, the more needful to guard against heathen curiosity. Wilt thou escape notice when thou signest thy bed, thy body? . . . when thou risest in the night to pray? and wilt thou not be thought to be working somewhat of sorcery? Will not thy husband know what thou tastest in secret before all food? and if he knoweth it to be bread, will he not believe it to be that which it is reported?"[2]

[1] S. CYPRIAN'S *Treatises, De Orat.* vi.: *Library of the Fathers.*
[2] TERTULLIAN, *De Uxor.* ii. 5: *Library of the Fathers.*

You see it is not here a question of a rare act, which the woman could easily conceal from her heathen husband, but, on the contrary, of a Communion almost as frequent as signing the Cross, or lying down to sleep, or rising in the night to pray. It is a question of bread which the woman would take every day, before the other food which she would never omit to take. Such was the secret domestic Communion of those who were unable to meet in the place of assembly. The same Father says that a Christian woman, not married to a heathen, is able to partake in the sacrifice without scruple, and is not hindered in her daily duty ("diligentia quotidiana"). So that he expects even a woman who is very far from perfection, having united herself to an idolater, to seek daily Communion.

Elsewhere Tertullian speaks of every one communicating on the "days of stations;"[1] and again: "The Sacrament of the Eucharist, commanded by the Lord at the time of supper, and to all, we receive at our meetings before daybreak, and from the hands of no others than the heads of the Church."[2] You see that the Communion was general, like the *Agapes*, for all except those actually undergoing penance.

V. S. Cyprian follows in the same line. "This bread," he says, "we pray may be given us day by day, lest we who are in Christ, and who daily receive the Eucharist for food of salvation, should by the admission of any grievous crime, and our

[1] *De Orat.* xix. The Wednesday and Friday of each week.
[2] *De Corona*, v.

therefore being shut out from Communion, and forbidden the heavenly bread, be separated from the Body of Christ. . . . Seeing that Christ says that if any man eat of His Bread he shall live for ever, it follows that while it is manifest that those do thus live who appertain to His Body, and receive the Eucharist by right of communication, so also is it matter both for our fears and prayers that none of us, by being forbidden Communion, be separated from the Body of Christ, and so remain far from salvation, as Himself threatens and declares: 'Unless ye eat the flesh of the Son of Man, and drink His Blood, ye have no life in you.' Hence, then, we pray that our Bread—that is, Christ—may be given to us day by day, that we who abide in Christ, and live in Him, may not draw back from His sanctification and His Body."[1]

*1st*, These words are explicit, and leave no room for questioning. "*We ask . . . and receive day by day.*" Reception was daily, as was the request. Those who knew themselves to be unworthy to communicate by reason of any mortal sin would not dare to seek their daily bread with the faithful at the celebration of the Mysteries.

*2nd*, None among the faithful was deprived of Communion on the day of assembly unless he had fallen into "*any grievous crime*" ("intercedente aliquo graviore delicto"). Assuredly those venial sins, of which S. Augustine says that they may be blotted out by the recital of the Lord's Prayer; those imperfections which the Apostles, taught by Jesus Christ, confessed daily in that prayer, could

[1] *De Orat. Dom.* xiii.

never be confounded with the "grievous crime" which excluded a man from Communion. The expression evidently distinguishes the greater sins from those daily venial sins from which even those most advanced in perfection can never long be free in this frail and sin-beset world.

*3rd*, S. Cyprian affirms that all those who are not guilty of "*any grievous crime*" "*receive the Eucharist by right of communication*," a right pertaining to every one of the faithful free from such crime.

*4th*, That Father looks upon privation of daily Communion as a severe punishment, and a great peril, inasmuch as he who is deprived of the Eucharist is "*separated from the Body of Christ, and remains far from salvation*," according to the awful words, "Except ye eat the Flesh of the Son of Man, and drink His Blood, ye have no life in you."

*5th*, This was not a question of the extraordinary case of violent persecution, when the Church permitted every one to carry the Eucharist to his own home, and when she would have each of her sons strengthened with the Blood of Christ, that he might have courage to shed his own in martyrdom. It was a question of ordinary rule, even in the most peaceful times, when all the faithful who were guiltless of "any grievous crime received the Eucharist by right of communication."

VI. The Eastern Church agreed with that of Africa. "I see," says S. Chrysostom, "many amongst the faithful who communicate in the Body of Jesus Christ after a presumptuous and indiscreet fashion, more as a habit and to satisfy formality, in

compliance with form, than thoughtfully, and with fitting emotions. 'I will communicate,' one says, 'in Lent or Epiphany;' and he communicates in whatever state he may be. But it is not the season of Lent or Epiphany which makes a man worthy to approach this Sacrament, but sincerity and purity of conscience. With this preparation APPROACH ALWAYS; without it, never."[1]

Observe that this Father admits of no medium between the two limits *always* and *never*. If your conscience be foul, come *not at all* to the Holy Eucharist; if, on the contrary, it be purified, *come always*. There is no midway, no restriction.

"I notice," he continues, "much irregularity in this matter. At other times you come not to the Holy Table, although you may be clean; but at Easter you communicate, although you are stained with sin. O custom! O presumption! In vain we offer a daily sacrifice; in vain we stand at the altar; no one approaches. I say this not merely to lead you to communicate, but rather that you may make yourselves worthy to communicate. Do you say that you are unworthy of the Holy Communion? Then you are also unworthy of prayer. You hear the deacon cry aloud, 'Let those who are in penance retire.' ALL THOSE WHO DO NOT COMMUNICATE ARE IN PENANCE! If you are one of the penitents, you must not communicate, for whoever does not communicate is in penance. Why does the deacon cry, 'Let those who cannot pray retire?' And do you boldly remain? But *you are not one of the penitents*, you answer. What! You are among

[1] *Ep. ad Eph.* c. i. Hom. iii.

those who may communicate, and you care not to do so! You think that it matters not? I conjure you to reflect. This is the Table of the King of Heaven; it is served by angels, the King Himself is present, and you with indifference hold back! Your garments are sullied, and you heed it not! *But they are clean*, say you? Well, then, haste to this Table, and communicate. The King comes daily to behold those who approach His Table, and to speak to them all, and now He speaks to your conscience: 'Why dost thou stand there, not having on the wedding garment?' He asks not, 'Why art thou at My Table?' but before you approach it, before you enter His House, He pronounces such unworthy. Therefore He says not, 'Why art Thou at My Table?' but 'How camest thou in hither?' This is what He says to all such of us as are here boldly and presumptuously. FOR WHOEVER SHARES NOT IN THE MYSTERIES IS HERE BOLDLY AND WITH TEMERITY. For this reason the penitents are first dismissed; just as when a master sits at table those servants who have offended him must be sent away. So when we offer this Sacrifice, when we sacrifice Jesus Christ, the Lord's Victim; when we say, 'Let us pray;' then be assured that Heaven descends to earth, and the angels come amongst us. Just, then, as those not initiated into the Mysteries must not participate, neither must they initiate if they be living in sin. Tell me, what would you think of one who, being invited to a feast, should wash his hands, and sit down to table, and then not eat? Would he not offend his host? Had he not better have remained absent? What

then—you come to our feast, you join our hymn of praise, you place yourself among the faithful, and yet you communicate not? 'I am unworthy,' some one replies. Then are you also unworthy to join in our prayers."

I will not enter here upon the question which may be raised as to such sinners as were guilty of sins which, though mortal, were secret. We need only take the term *penance* in its general sense, without applying it specially to public or private penance. It is enough that S. Chrysostom admits of no medium between the condition of penitents who have forfeited their right, and that of the faithful who communicate on every day of assembly. No matter, if certain men who esteem themselves cleansed and virtuous, who are not in penance as open sinners, yet abstain from Communion, not counting themselves fit enough, such a condition is very dangerous to him who persists in it, and derogatory to the Sacrament. In vain some would affect to show respect to the Sacrament by depriving themselves, out of reverence, from receiving it frequently. S Chrysostom refutes and condemns them, saying, "You allege that your garments are clean? Well, then, come to the Table and communicate. Whosoever does not partake of the Mysteries comes impudently and with temerity. All who do not communicate are in penance. You answer that you are not in penance. . . . How then? Are you among those who may communicate, and yet care not to do so? . . . You have joined in the Feast, you have sung the hymn, you have placed yourself among those who are worthy by not retiring with

the unworthy; wherefore do you remain without communicating?" In short, according to this Father, there is no alternative between doing penance with the sinners or communicating with the just. So far from doing honour to the Sacrament by depriving one's self of receiving it, one offends Jesus Christ, Who invites us to His Feast, when we eat not. The real way of doing honour to our *daily* bread is worthily to eat it EVERY DAY.

Again S. Chrysostom says, quoting S. Paul, "Many are weak and sickly among you, and many sleep.[1] How, you say, should such be our state, when we receive this Sacrament but once in the year? It is even for that very thing, for you imagine that worthiness consists not in purity of conscience, but in the length of interval between your Communions. *You esteem as the greatest honour and respect you can show to the Sacrament to approach but seldom to the celestial Table.* Do you not know that you are liable to eternal perdition in communicating unworthily *even once;* and that, on the other hand, you forward your salvation each time that you communicate worthily, however frequently? *The danger lies not in coming too often to the Lord's Table*, but in coming unworthily, were it only once in the course of your life. Why, then, measure your Communions by time? *Purity of conscience makes the time fitting.* This blessed Mystery is the same at Easter as at other times. It is always the same, always conveying the same grace of the Holy Spirit. *It is Easter all the year.* Be it Friday or Saturday, or on Martyrs' feast-days,

[1] 2 Cor. xi.

it is always the same Victim and the same Sacrifice. The Lord has not limited His Sacrifice to any particular time."

Nothing can be more strongly in favour of frequent Communion than these words, which show :—

*1st*, That the faithful were mistaken in looking upon a rare approach to the Sacrament as a mark of respect.

*2nd*, That purity of conscience makes all times suitable for drawing near : to such as are pure "*it is Easter all the year.*" Friday, Saturday, Sunday, the usual days of Communion in the East, all offer the same Victim as does the great Easter feast.

*3rd*, It is infrequent Communion which is the cause of error.

*4th*, That the Lord has not limited His Sacrifice to any special season.

*5th*, That the long interval between Communions is the cause why many of the faithful are weak and sickly, and, so to say, fall asleep.

VII. S. Hilary uses precisely similar language : "Give us," he says, "our daily bread ; for what would God have so much as that Jesus Christ should daily dwell in us? He, the Bread of Life, the Bread come down from Heaven. We ask it daily ; let us daily receive it." These words, which are quoted by the Fourth Council of Toledo, are conclusive.

VIII. S. Ambrose confirms this universal doctrine in the following words :—"If it be daily bread, wherefore do you only eat it once a year, as do the Greeks in the East? Receive it daily, so that daily it may profit you. Live so as to deserve to

receive it daily. He who is not fit to receive it daily is not fit to receive it at the year's end. Did not holy Job offer a daily sacrifice for his children, for fear they might have sinned in thought or word? But do not ye know that every time the Sacrifice is offered, the Death, Resurrection, and Ascension of the Lord, and the remission of sins, is set forth? And yet you do not receive this bread of life daily! He who is wounded seeks not the healing remedy. The sin which binds us is our wounds; our remedy is in the Heavenly and most venerable Sacrament."[1]

*1st*, When S. Ambrose speaks of the Greeks, he doubtless alludes to the carelessness and irreverence into which many among them had fallen, and for which S. Chrysostom rebukes them.

*2nd*, This Father knows no other way of giving due honour to the daily bread than to eat it daily, and so to live as never to be deprived a single day of it. Hence we see that the faithful may, by God's Grace, attain to such a state of purity of conscience as to deserve daily Communion.

*3rd*, This heavenly bread is our remedy against sin. Of course it is not, like the Sacrament of Penance, an expiatory remedy for mortal sin, but it is a preservative against such sin. And, moreover, we cannot doubt but that it effaces venial sin by the fire of Divine Love which it kindles in men's hearts.

IX. "You ask," S. Jerome says to Lucinius,[2] "whether to observe the fast of Saturday, and whether to receive the Eucharist daily, as is the wont of the Churches of Rome and of Spain?" He goes on in reply to say that, with respect to the

[1] *De Sacram.* lib. v. [2] Epist. liii.

fast, one Church should not condemn the customs of another Church, albeit unlike its own; "that each province may have its own use, and venerate its ancient rules as apostolic laws." But as to the Eucharist, he says decisively, "Receive the Eucharist always without condemning us, and provided your conscience be free, giving heed to the words of the Psalmist, 'O taste and see how gracious the Lord is!'"

*1st*, You see by this that daily Communion was the custom of the Churches of Rome and Spain for all the faithful who were not undergoing penance, although in the East the Mysteries were only celebrated on certain days of the week.

*2nd*, S. Jerome bids Lucinius follow this practice of daily Communion.

*3rd*, He bids Lucinius communicate daily without condemning those Churches wherein Communion was restricted to certain days of the week.

*4th*, He permits daily Communion only when the conscience is not burthened with sin.

X. "Some," says S. Augustine, "receive the Body and Blood of the Lord daily in Communion; others receive it on certain days. There are places where no day goes by without the Sacrifice; in others it is offered only on Thursday and Sunday; in others on Sunday only. Among such diversities one may fairly conclude that we are free in such matters. There is no better discipline for a wise, earnest Christian than to comply with the customs he finds established in the Church where he may be."[1]

*1st*, Here, you see, it is only a question of the

[1] Epist. liv.

various uses of Churches, some of which met together, offered the Sacrifice, and communicated daily, others somewhat less frequently. But S. Augustine says that the best discipline is for a Christian to communicate daily, or nearly so, according to the use of the Church in which he happens to dwell.

*2nd*, Observe, too, that he speaks of offering and eating as synonymous. They who "let no day go by without offering the Sacrifice" are the same as those who "daily receive the Body and Blood of the Lord in Communion." Those who only communicated on certain days of the week only offered the Sacrifice on those days. Practically, the people communicated whenever Mass was said.

Again, S. Augustine says: "Some one will say that you should not receive every day. You ask wherefore? 'Because,' he will reply, 'you ought to choose those days in which you live in the greatest purity and continence, so as to approach more worthily to this great Sacrament, inasmuch as he who receives unworthily eats and drinks his own condemnation.' But another man will say, 'If the sore of past sin is so deep, and the sickness so grievous that this remedy must be postponed, it is by the Bishop's authority that any one should be deprived of the altar in penance, and then be reconciled; for it is unworthy Communion to receive when a man ought to be doing penance.' But this ought not to be so interpreted as for each one to exclude or admit himself as he sees fit. Moreover, unless his sins be *so grievous that it is thought right to excommunicate the guilty man, he ought*

*not to deprive himself of the daily remedy of the Body of the Lord.* We might decide between the two by bidding them, above all things, abide in the peace of Jesus Christ, each doing what he is honestly convinced is right. Neither one nor the other is lacking in reverence for the Body and Blood of the Lord; on the contrary, they vie with each other in reverencing the healing Sacrament. One, out of respect, does not receive it daily; the other, equally out of respect, does not miss receiving it any day."

*1st*, Here you must not forget that the question is not between daily or rare Communion, but between daily Communion and a somewhat less, though still frequent, reception. S. Augustine approves of each Church abiding by her own use.

*2nd*, The two uses alike maintain the principal point, namely, that all the faithful communicated as often as they met together to celebrate the Sacrifice.

*3rd*, According to S. Augustine, as also S. Cyprian, S. Chrysostom, and S. Jerome, a man has no right to deprive himself of Communion when there is a celebration of the Mysteries, unless he knows himself to be in mortal sin. What S. Cyprian calls "a grievous crime," S. Chrysostom "being among the penitents," and S. Jerome "remorse of conscience" (*pungente conscientia*)—that same condition S. Augustine characterises as rendering the guilty man worthy of excommunication, unless he submits himself humbly to penance.

*4th*, With respect to venial daily sins, which are effaced by a simple and devout recitation of the Lord's Prayer, S. Augustine says that they find

their daily remedy in daily Communion, through the fervour of love kindled in the heart by the Heavenly Gift. Thus daily frailties, so far from hindering us from daily Communion, supply, on the contrary, a strong reason for having recourse to this daily cure. It is a poor reverence for a remedy which would keep us from using it, and cause it to be wasted while we so greatly need it.

5*th*, It is permissible, according to the use of divers Churches, out of reverence, not to presume to receive the Eucharist daily, because there are days when a man feels himself over-distracted with business, or dissipated by inevitable external matters. In such a case he may choose those days in which he is living with the greatest purity and continence; but this only applies to more or less days in the week, and each in his degree ought to strive continually to make his Communions as frequent as possible. So far from seeking to communicate rarely out of reverence, S. Chrysostom says that the greatest grief of the faithful should be deferring Communion owing to any individual imperfection.

6*th*, Although S. Augustine sanctions this use of some Churches, he nevertheless extols the other, namely, that all the faithful communicate daily.

7*th*, The great Doctor does not permit any man to condemn himself to penance, excluding himself from daily Communion. He would have every one judged by the Bishop, and be "deprived of the altar" by his authority only; otherwise the humblest and most penitent persons, who are the worthiest to receive, would never communicate, because they

would never esteem themselves worthy of Communion.

*8th*, Except in the case of so great sins that the guilty man deserves excommunication if he refuse to do penance, the faithful have a right to Communion, and the pastor has none to deprive them.

The same Father says to those newly baptized, "Ye ought to know what ye have received, what ye do receive, and will receive daily. The Bread you see upon the altar, which is sanctified by the Word of God, is the Body of Jesus Christ."[1] Here we have daily Communion, which, according to S. Augustine's teaching, ought to be given to all neophytes, who are but beginners in Christian discipline, and the lowest of the faithful.

Moreover, it is well known that this Father was satisfied that the words, "Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of Man, and drink His blood, ye have no life in you," are to be taken literally as meaning the Eucharist, so that there can be no spiritual life save in so far as it is nourished by Communion. Thus he says, treating of the words, "Give us this day our daily bread:"[2] "This request has a double meaning, first with respect to bodily nourishment, and next with respect to spiritual aliment. . . . The faithful know what that spiritual food is, which you will know also (ye, the *competentes*) when you receive from the altar of God; it will be the bread, and that daily, which is needful for this life. . . . The Eucharist is our daily bread." Observe that it is a question of two kinds of bread equally necessary to life—one for the body, the other for

[1] Serm. ccxxvii. [2] *Ibid.* lvii.

the soul. Both are daily, because man, frail and feeble, needs continual sustenance. Day by day he needs renewing and repairing lost strength, even more in mind than in body, so that this nourishment is required daily to prevent a perilous apathy. And hence S. Augustine would have even the *competentes*, directly after their baptism, admitted to daily Communion.

Finally, the venerable Doctor says as follows: "My brethren, let no one presume to despise the advice to seek a wholesome penitence because he sees many faithful approach the Sacrament of the altar whom he knows to be guilty of sin. (He means mortal scandalous sin.) Many are corrected, like Peter; many are tolerated, like Judas; many are unknown until the Coming of the Lord. . . . But we, on our part, are not suffered to deprive any one of Communion (although such privation be only for healing, not for destruction) unless a man either voluntarily confess himself guilty, or that he be accused and convicted by a fitting tribunal, whether secular or ecclesiastical." So we see that the African discipline, like to that of Rome, was to give Communion daily to all those who presented themselves, unless they either avowed themselves guilty of mortal sin, or were publicly convicted thereof by competent judges.

XI. These formal pronouncements of the Fathers are altogether in conformity with the general practice of the early Church as regards the Eucharist. We have already seen that this Sacrament is bread, and that daily bread. Yesterday's food will not suffice for to-day. As our needs are perpetually

renewed, so must the sustenance be also perpetually renewed. Of old the soul's nourishment was given daily at the same time with that of the body; the Eucharist and the meal called *Agape* were connected. And further, the Eucharist was always given immediately after baptism; so that directly a man was regenerate he was fed with his daily bread. The holy wine was even given to infants at the breast; and although Communion was at that time always given in both kinds whenever it was possible, they were separated in the case of such infants who could not take the bread, and they were given their heavenly food, although as yet unconscious of its value. Further, as I have already said, the bread was given in baskets to the faithful to be taken home during seasons of persecution, when they could not meet together safely. They had a coffer in which to conceal this precious treasure, and every one, man or woman, took for themselves this household Communion, until such time as they could assemble with safety in the appointed place of celebration. And when the Mysteries were celebrated, the deacons were wont, S. Justin tells us, to take the Communion to the absent after those present had received it. So that you see even absence, when involuntary, was not a reason for any one of the faithful to be deprived of Communion on the days of assembly. Rather than leave them to be so deprived for any length of time, they were trusted with baskets of the consecrated bread, and the possible irreverence to which such a custom was open was less feared than the evil of losing daily Communion. Finally, we see in the

celebrated instance of the Communion of Serapion, that a young boy, a layman, was trusted to carry the Eucharist to a sick man, rather than let him run the risk of dying without receiving it. The more we are amazed at this discipline, so different from that of a later period, the more we must recognise that the early Church intended the faithful to make much more familiar use of the Eucharist than is common now amongst ourselves, and that she overlooked many inconveniences and dangers in order to promote Communion among the faithful. Undoubtedly there were many saints among the Christians of those days, but they were not all saints; good men had their various imperfections, as we have seen, and abuses crept even into Communion, as we learn from the Apostle himself.

XII. This ancient discipline is confirmed by the authority of the Council of Trent, which teaches that no one conscious of mortal sin, even though he believes himself to be contrite, should communicate without confession.[1] Here, you will observe, no one is excluded from Communion save those who are conscious of mortal sin. The Council says further, that Christians ought to believe in and reverence this Sacrament with so firm a faith, such fervour and devotion, as to be able frequently to receive that Bread which is above all else, so that it may be verily the life of their souls, and the perpetual health of their mind; and that the strength

[1] "Ecclesiastica autem consuetudo declarat, eam probationem necessariam esse, ut nullus sibi conscius peccati mortalis, quantumvis sibi contritus videatur absque præmissa sacramentali confessione ad sacram Eucharistiam accedere debeat."—*Sess.* xiii. c. vii.

they derive therefrom may carry them through the temptations of this earthly pilgrimage to their Heavenly Rest.[1]

And, lastly, you cannot give too much weight to these words: "The Sacred Council desires that the faithful assisting at every Mass should likewise communicate at it, not merely in spirit and affection, but by sacramentally receiving the Eucharist, to the end that they may obtain more abundant fruit from this Blessed Sacrifice."[2] Thus we see that the Church has at all times taught the same thing. She never can grow old, or change her pure doctrine. The same mind which prompted her in the time of S. Justin finds utterance now. She invites all her children to *frequent* Communion; she would fain never have them present at Mass without communicating. And, in fact, the Eucharist having been instituted as a substitute for the Jewish sacrifices called "peace-offerings," in which the victim was offered and eaten by those present, we offend against the Sacrifice of Jesus Christ when we join with the priest in offering it without being willing also to join in eating thereof. The only thing at which the Council stops short, in fearfulness, is when a Christian has mortal sin on his conscience ("sibi conscius mortalis peccati").

XII. It is idle to object that we often see those who are unworthy make their Communion. We answer with S. Augustine, "Some are corrected, like Peter; some tolerated, like Judas." I confess that many Christians bear the name only to profane and disgrace it; they are far below the catechumens

[1] *Sess.* xiii. c. viii. [2] *Ibid.* xxii. *Doct. de Sacr.* c. vi.

and penitents of primitive times. They ought to be dismissed before the Mysteries are celebrated; but in order to their exclusion, S. Augustine tells us that either their own confession or a public sentence is requisite. Furthermore, there are many people who, while observing a certain outward decency of life, are devoid of the true principles of vital Christianity; and if we reflect upon their condition, we cannot class them among the faithful who are worthy of Communion. But I am not speaking of such as these. I am dealing only with pure, humble, teachable, recollected souls, conscious of their own imperfections, and anxious to correct them through the virtue of the heavenly food. Why should any one be scandalised to see them communicate frequently? Do you answer, because of their imperfections? But it is precisely to attain perfection that they so communicate. Does not S. Ambrose say that sin is our wound, and the remedy is that Heavenly and venerable Sacrament? Does not S. Augustine say that if a man's sins are not so great as to deserve excommunication (supposing him to refuse penance), he ought not to deprive himself of the daily remedy of the Body of the Lord? No one is surprised to see good priests say Mass daily, yet they are not without their own imperfections. Why then be scandalised to see good laymen, who, seeking to overcome their infirmities, and the temptations of a corrupt world, approach daily to feed upon Jesus Christ? If you wait till you are free from imperfections to communicate daily, you will wait for ever. God wills, so says S. Augustine, that we should live beneath the yoke of

a daily confession of our sins. S. John says, without any exception of persons, "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. . . . If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His Word is not in us."[1] And another Apostle says, "In many things we offend all."[2] So that we must be content to see the faithful falling into venial sin, notwithstanding their desire not to commit such, and yet communicating profitably every day. We have no right to give such weight to their imperfections, suffered by God for their greater humiliation, while we overlook the great and terrible faults from which this "daily remedy" saves them. I repeat it: the early Christians who communicated daily, yet were subject to many notable imperfections; yet shall we presume to condemn their daily Communions, and criticise the primitive Church which permitted these notwithstanding? Further, we do not see that the early Christians made regular confession of these daily faults, whereas the faithful of our times make frequent confession in preparation for Communion. Finally, the early Christians communicated privately, and at their own hands, in time of persecution, rather than forego daily Communion. The present times are not less perilous. Persecution is all the more dangerous that it is disguised under a semblance of peace, and that the tempter seduces us with the poison of pride and luxury. That refinement of irreligion, that flattering security, that hypocrisy which eats into our social system as a gangrene, is more to be feared than the sword and

[1] 1 John i. 8, 10. [2] James iii. 2.

the torture. Never was the "daily remedy" so necessary.

How many scrupulous good men we see who do not advance for want of this food. They spend themselves in cogitations and fruitless attempts; they are fearful, trembling; they are continually doubting, and vainly seek a certainty which is never to be found in this life. They are without spiritual unction. They want to live for Jesus Christ without living by Him; they are dry, withered, exhausted, fainting. They are close to the Fountain of living water, yet voluntarily die of thirst. They seek to do everything externally, but shrink from imbibing inward strength. They want to carry the heavy burthen of the Law without lightening it by the spirit of consolation to be found in prayer and frequent Communion.

XIV. I grant that a wise, pious director may deprive a person for a short time of Communion, whether in order to test his docility and humility, if need be, or to save him from the snares of some illusion, or of some secret self-conceit; but such tests should only be made when really necessary, and then but for a short time. As soon as may be the soul should be restored to its proper food. People say that we all need penances, but you must distinguish between the penitence of a good man and that of one guilty of mortal sin. Penitence is necessary to all, doubtless, but the penitence of the first is wholly compatible with Communion. Priests are in a state of penitence while they are daily saying Mass; the greatest saints, communicating in like manner, live in continual penitence. The

saints of old were true penitents, but they practised daily Communion.

Do not then be disturbed, sir, at the arguments brought against the discipline of the primitive Church. Let those who will despise our modern devotions, and profess to heed nothing short of primitive times. You see what was taught in those primitive times; you see that they are in perfect agreement with the Council of Trent.

Go on then communicating, even as the Apostles taught the first Christians to communicate, and as the Fathers taught those that came immediately after them to do. Let those argue who would fain reform everything, and do you eat your daily bread, so that living by Jesus Christ you may live to Him. Let yourself be guided, not by cavillers, who are for ever ready to criticise and take scandal at everything, but by your own pastors, or some wise and experienced director, who will lead you faithfully according to the spirit of the Church.

Edinburgh : Printed by T. and A. Constable.

WITHDRAWN

WITHDRAWN

CATHOLIC THEOLOGICAL UNION
3 0311 00105 6592

BX 2183 .F4 A4 1903
Feþnelon, Francıois de
Salignac de La Mothe-,
The spiritual letters of
Archbishop Feþnelon

3 0311 00165 6592